

Commentary

July-August 1999

Arming China Against Ourselves

Aaron L. Friedberg

"A Man's Own Household His Enemies"

Gertrude Himmelfarb

Can the Bible Be Trusted?

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The Prospering Fathers

Paul Johnson

Sex, Death, and Picasso

Steven C. Munson

Opera USA

Terry Teachout

Exchanges: CNN's "Cold War" / The Pope & the Holocaust

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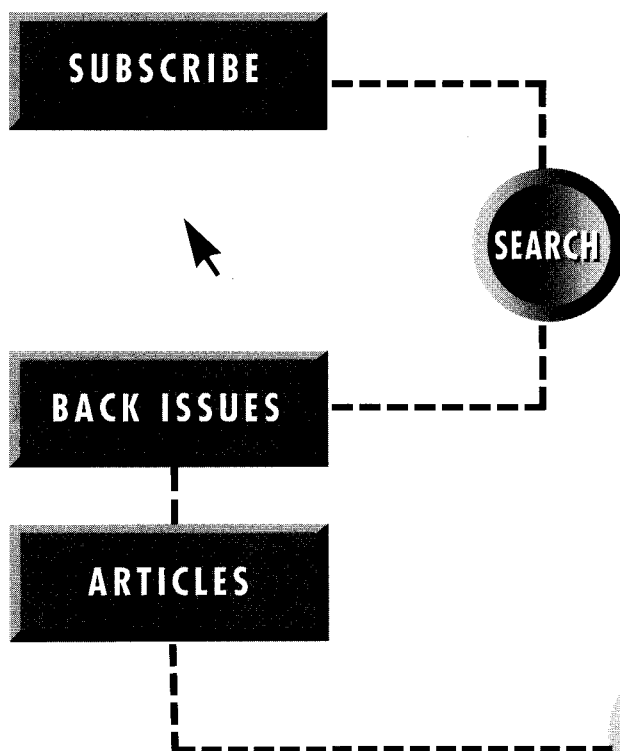


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Letters from Readers

CNN's "Cold War"

TO THE EDITOR:

In his long, occasionally thoughtful, but ultimately harsh essay on CNN's *Cold War* ["Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War," March], Gabriel Schoenfeld wonders why the series does not in all respects reflect the perspective of my recent book, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History*, which he has generously reviewed. The answer is simple. I authored the book. I consulted on the television series and, to a lesser extent, the printed materials associated with it. I did not, in any part of the CNN project, have editorial control.

There are, of course, some things I would have done differently had I had such authority. But should I have withdrawn from the series because I did not get my way at all times? It never occurred to me to do so, for several reasons. First, the ground rules were clear from the outset: the pro-

ducers, not the consultants, were to have the last word. Second, I had assumed—naively, it now seems—that critics would understand the distinction between authorship and consultancy. Finally, I remain convinced that this series presents the cold war more effectively than has been done or ever will be done again on television. I am proud to have my name associated with it—as a consultant.

JOHN LEWIS GADDIS
Yale University
New Haven, Connecticut

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld claims that CNN's *Cold War* is an anti-American concoction that excuses "the most egregious Soviet conduct" and ignores a battle "between good and evil, between freedom and slavery, between democracy and totalitarianism." He also claims that some episodes contain "deliberate historical falsification."

I feel conflicted by these charges. As a Russian who

very much longed for freedom and democracy, I am with Mr. Schoenfeld. But as a historian and one of the principal consultants for the series, I simply do not see anti-American "conspiracy" or falsification in the film.

I believe that Mr. Schoenfeld has many axes to grind: against the Communist sympathizers and fellow-travelers of the 1930's, "revisionist" historians of the 1960's, pro-détente liberals of the 1970's, and Ted Turner and "peaceniks" of the 1980's. This ideological bent may explain why he approaches the cold war not as a complex historical drama with multiple meanings, but simply as a crusade against the "evil empire."

Mr. Schoenfeld is not satisfied with damning the series with faint praise. Instead, he "unmasks" a hostile pattern using selective quotations and his own flawed judgment of history. He ignores *Cold War's* praise for Western policies of opposition to Stalinism in Eu-

rope (see the programs "Berlin Blockade" and "Marshall Plan") and in Asia ("Korea"). But he castigates the series for demonstrating that an exaggerated American perception of the Communist threat contributed to a dangerous nuclear-arms race, as well as insecurity and some anti-democratic practices at home.

I agree with Mr. Schoenfeld that *Cold War* should have highlighted more the massive Soviet penetration of the U.S. before and during World War II. But, as Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev reveal in their new book, *The Haunted Wood*, as of November 1945—i.e., before the cold war began—the Soviet "fifth column" in the U.S. was compromised by defections and quickly melted away.

As one responsible for facts (if not all the judgments) in CNN's *Cold War*, I categorically reject Mr. Schoenfeld's claim that the series drew a "moral equivalence" between Stalin's em-

pire and the United States. The series recapitulates the horrors of the Stalinist regime, and with footage of the concentration camps at Kolyma it shows graphically the evil of the Communist system. I disagree equally with those Left-radical historians who claim that *Cold War* blames Stalin exclusively for the origins of the cold war and defends most U.S. policies. Both sides, I believe, build a straw man from the series and use it to advocate their agendas.

CNN's *Cold War* tries to convey the moral ambiguity so often found in history and the complexity of human personalities. It presents Ronald Reagan, for instance, as both a contributor to war danger and a partner to Gorbachev in ending the cold war. But for

Mr. Schoenfeld, everyone is either a hero or a villain: Reagan is without blemish and beyond reproach.

CNN's *Cold War* is not without flaws and biases. But its main thrust, from "The Iron Curtain" to "The Wall Falls Down," does not hide the obvious fact that freedom was on one side and oppression and tyranny on the other. Sometimes the series is critical of American actions. But should American foreign policy escape critical judgment just because the other side was incomparably worse? U.S. alliances and deals with Mao Zedong, the apartheid regime in South Africa, and dictators here and there may have been validated by the victory over Communism. But not everyone around the world would agree.

In the great Western tradition of free critical discourse, the series presents many viewpoints and experiences. For me, as a former subject of the "evil empire," this tradition was the most obvious victor in CNN's *Cold War*.

VLADISLAV M. ZUBOK
National Security Archive
George Washington
University
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

*My good blade carves
the casques of men;
My stout lance thrusteth
sure.
My strength is as the
strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.*

Arise Sir Gabriel Schoenfeld, the Galahad of our day, as well as the Don Quixote—

tilting at windmills. I have tried to take seriously his piece, "Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War." But I am not sure, even as I sit down to write, that I can do it. I once knew a television series of the sort he commends to your readers in which the witnesses and the narrator combined with the protagonist to assure viewers that he had acted nobly at all times, and deserved only our admiration. It was called *Mountbatten*. I once asked Lord Louis Mountbatten if ever in his life he had made a mistake—he answered "No." Later, in an interview for the television series *The World at War*, he suggested I have him introduced by an acolyte who would say what he wanted said in his praise before he spoke. I declined; the three-cheers-for-us school of history suffered a setback, and should not, in my view, be resurrected, especially not for the cold war.

Mr. Schoenfeld begins, beguilingly, by praising the *Cold War* series for the depth of its research and the skill of its compilation, recognized by a Peabody award in the U.S. and by a BAFTA nomination in the United Kingdom. But he attacks the series as history; Mr. Schoenfeld would have written it differently. Of course. I write now not principally to quarrel with that—though I may—but to set the record straight on key facts.

First, editorial responsibility for the series is with me and with my co-executive producer, Pat Mitchell, president of CNN Productions. John Lewis Gaddis, like Vladislav Zubok and Professor Lawrence Freedman, head of the department of war studies at King's College, London, acted as consultants to the



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series. They are not responsible for its content; Pat Mitchell and I are.

Second, although John Lewis Gaddis was good enough to read the typescript of the book, written by Taylor Downing and by me, that accompanies the series, he is in no way responsible for what it contains. Mr. Gaddis will be judged by his peers as the preeminent U.S. historian of the cold war because of his own reflective and authoritative volumes. Nor is CNN in any way responsible for the book, except that the series Ted Turner commissioned sparked it off. What CNN is responsible for is an imaginative *Cold War* website, offering a critical apparatus to complement the series. It has had more than twelve million visits so far.

I note that Mr. Schoenfeld is senior editor of COMMENTARY, and that hurts, for I always had the idea that COMMENTARY was a serious journal. He quotes selectively, and—willfully or inadvertently—I know which is worse—misunderstands and misrepresents. I take only one example: the extent of Leninist/Stalinist terror, which he thinks is seriously understated in both documentary and book. It is true there is not much about Lenin in a narrative whose effective starting point is 1945. But here is the book, pages 8 and 9:

In 1937 the terror extended into almost every walk of life. Artists and writers, scientists and doctors, were executed or imprisoned. Top generals in the army were purged, and one in three of the entire officer corps were arrested. Millions of ordinary

peasants and workers were also denounced as “enemies of the people.” A knock on the door in the night, exile to a forced-labor camp, a bullet in the back of the head, became the hallmarks of Stalin’s rule. George Kennan, gazing out of his office window above Red Square thought to himself that he was looking out over “one of the bloodiest spots in the world.” Stalin sent between 17 million and 22 million of his own countrymen to their deaths during the 1930’s, including those who starved or died of maltreatment in the labor camps of Siberia—nearly three times the number of victims that would be claimed by Hitler’s Holocaust.

Here’s the documentary, episode one: “Stalin was

master of the economic plan. But he was also a tyrant who tolerated no failure and no criticism. . . . Privately owned fields became collectivized prairies. The cost of collectivization was the murder of millions of peasants and renewed famine. The truth was kept secret.” On which a Soviet citizen comments: “People didn’t know about the bad things. All the achievements were put down to [Stalin’s] initiatives. Those who knew otherwise would shut up. They knew if they said anything, they would be imprisoned and shot. It was a regime of terror.”

And in episode six, “Reds”—which deliberately compares and contrasts McCarthyite hysteria, which claimed two lives, the Rosenbergs, convicted and guilty of espionage, with Stalin’s millions of victims—Susan

na Pechuro, a student whose comrades were executed but who herself survived the Gulag, testifies:

There are some things that are so awful I don’t let myself remember them, because if I do I can’t sleep for weeks. They pulled children out of the arms of their screaming mothers, and then beat the mothers. The children just disappeared, they never knew what happened to them afterward. There was nothing more awful than that, even though I saw them killing people, anything else they felt like doing.

And here’s the book:

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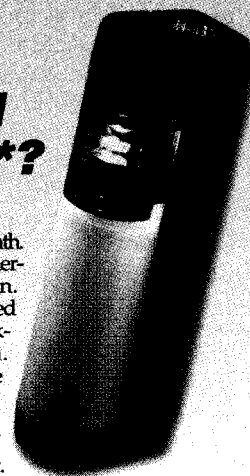
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Union endured far worse: the Great Terror. McCarthyism, and every other American hysteria, paled in comparison to the paranoia that permeated the Soviet system and Communist East Europe in the late 1940's and early 1950's, as it had done during Stalin's reign of terror in the 1930's. Hundreds of thousands of people were sent to labor camps. Many thousands, loyal party members, were executed. In Hungary as many as one family in three had a member in jail during the Stalinist period. In the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, conformity was everything. No dissent was allowed; independent thought was fiercely tracked down, rooted out, and repressed. What in the United States was an aberration was in the Soviet world the system itself.

How can Mr. Schoenfeld claim that my colleagues and I treat the two cold-war great powers as moral equals? He can only do so by ignoring plain evidence to the contrary. His case is built on sand; to refute it, I have only to invite your readers to watch the series, and read the book.

It is certainly true, though, that the series is less judgmental and more even-handed than Mr. Schoenfeld might welcome. So is all good history. The world does not easily divide into goodies and baddies as children's games, ancient Hollywood myths, and now COMMENTARY would have it. And we can learn from both sides. Nazis contributed to *The World at War*, and made it richer and more complex. It is obviously right that Soviet eyewitnesses should participate in *Cold War*, and indeed

Poles, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians, Germans who bore its brunt and paid its price.

The cold war, particularly at its outset, was both an ideological conflict and an exercise in *realpolitik*. Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter, Reagan, and Bush come out of it as major, serious, even heroic players on the world stage. I defy anyone to view the series in its entirety and not feel the strong continuity in U.S. foreign policy that first acted to contain Communism, and then saw it crumble into surrender and defeat. But these were humans, not gods. Does anyone doubt that Harry Truman grew in the presidency? Or that Ronald Reagan surprised us, in the alacrity with which he reached for agreement on arms limitation with an "evil empire"? But both Truman and Reagan, in their own utterance, and in the words of those who worked with them, are depicted at full stature in *Cold War*.

Mr. Schoenfeld's farrago of imaginings gave me two particular pleasures. He cites, feelingly, the ghastly description of the death of Peter Fechter at the Berlin Wall—the East unwilling, the West thinking itself unable, to save him. I agree with him; this moves and chills us. Charles Krauthammer, in the *Washington Post*, however, took the very same sequence as an indefensible instance of our attributing "moral equivalence" to both sides' responsibility for Fechter's death.

And in a footnote that belongs in a comic book, Mr. Schoenfeld charges:

In the segments of *Cold War* devoted to the Soviet-American competition in the third world, the Com-

munist side is consistently represented by attractive-looking, articulate spokesmen—Soviets, Cubans, Nicaraguans, and Angolans—who passionately and persuasively defend their cause. The U.S. side, by contrast, is represented by a gaggle of cynical ex-CIA men who not only look like thugs from central casting but speak like them as well. By this means is a process that looks like evenhandedness put in the service of deliberate historical falsification.

If we include Afghanistan in the third world, and also the film's episode on spies, this fanciful paragraph is a slur on noted public servants, all CIA: John Stockwell, Howard Hunt, Paul Wimert, Duane Claridge, Frank Anderson, Dr. Charles Cogan, David Murphy, Melvin Goodman, Sydney Graybeal, Joe Bulik, Admiral Stansfield Turner, Jeanne Vertefeuille, and Sandy Grimes, among others. I will take them against the KGB any day; they came, not from central casting, but from the real world.

More seriously, Mr. Schoenfeld's careless charge of "deliberate historical falsification" is totally unsubstantiated. It is a particular travesty that COMMENTARY should have given his piece the title "Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War," since he signally fails to indict book or series for even one. (There is an *erratum* in the book, by the way. I offer a bottle of fine Scotch malt to the first COMMENTARY reader to spot it, and let me know.)

The last word belongs, Mr. Schoenfeld suggests, "to those who paid a terrible price for risking their own freedom in freedom's name."

In the series, I award it to Vaclav Havel:

Communism as a system went against life, against man's fundamental needs; against the need for freedom; the need to be enterprising, to associate freely; against the will of the nation. It suppressed national identity. Something that goes against life may last a long time—but sooner or later, it will collapse.

And I rest my case.

[SIR] JEREMY ISAACS
Jeremy Isaacs Productions Ltd.
London, England

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's analysis of CNN's *Cold War* raises profound issues about the difficulties of teaching American history from an international perspective—difficulties that Americans like me, who teach in overseas universities, must confront daily.

Mr. Schoenfeld asks, "Why is it that so many people in the West continue to cling to a version of history in which the most egregious Soviet conduct is excused or explained away, while the United States is condemned for transgressions it did not commit?" I am not sure this question is fairly phrased, but it is true that when considering the cold war, many people in the West hold the U.S. to a higher standard than they do the Soviet Union. We expect political murder and repression of freedom from the Soviets. When their leaders rise above these practices, they deserve our surprise, if not our praise.

On the other hand, we expect the U.S. to uphold the civil liberties that are the foundation of our Constitution—for without them it cannot be the "good" in the

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"colossal battle between good and evil" that Mr. Schoenfeld describes. And when it falls short of these expectations, it deserves our criticism.

American excesses of enthusiasm in the prosecution of the cold war both at home and abroad have hampered Americans' ability to assert unflinchingly our national virtue. If we wish credibly to point to the basic American commitment to civil freedoms, we must also acknowledge that we ourselves have threatened the integrity of this commitment.

ERIC RAUCHWAY
*Oxford University
Oxford, England*

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld admirably illuminates some of the moral fog that envelops CNN's *Cold War* series. He might have reflected more, however, on the most disturbing aspect of *Cold War*, which was not its startling relativism, nor even the undue respect (and airtime) it gave to the likes of Fidel Castro.

What is most unsettling and irresponsible about the series is the Orwellian way it uses language both to reorder history and to protect Soviet leaders from too harsh a judgment of their actions. The narrative is not merely relativistic; it actually misdirects the audience.

Take, for example, the depiction of the reigniting of the cold war in the early 1980's. We are shown the following sequence of events: Reagan's "evil empire" speech, his speech announcing the Strategic Defense Initiative, Yuri Andropov's accession to the Soviet leadership, and a worldwide nuclear-war warning by the KGB. The implication is clear to the av-

erage viewer: Reagan came to power and made outrageous speeches, scared the Soviets silly, and nearly started World War III.

The problem is that these events did not happen even remotely in this order. The KGB war warning was put in place in 1981 under Brezhnev; Andropov came to power a year later; and Reagan's speeches were a year after that. The idea that Reagan was responding to, rather than causing, Soviet actions is not likely to occur to anyone listening to *Cold War's* narrative, because in CNN's version of events, such an interpretation is logically impossible.

Likewise, arms-reduction talks in Geneva in 1983 were not "broken off," nor did Soviet tanks in Lithuania just "attack" in 1991. The Soviets walked out of the negotiations, and someone ordered those tanks to attack. But rather than raise the disturbing question of who sent in the tanks—the series makes plain that Mikhail Gorbachev ended the cold war, so it could not have been he—the script simply phrases the event indirectly and moves on.

This is more disturbing than the revisionism, bias, and overemphasis on the recollections of torturers and dictators that Mr. Schoenfeld rightly decries. John Lewis Gaddis claims that his students would find "laughable" the assertion that the CNN series is guilty of moral relativism. Of course they would. For students, or ordinary viewers, to decide whether the show is really arguing the case for moral relativism would have required *Cold War* to make that case explicitly instead of burying it in obfuscatory language and

a garbled retelling of events. This is not, as *Cold War's* producers claim, history told in anecdotes. It is history written in Newspeak.

THOMAS M. NICHOLS
*U.S. Naval War College
Newport, Rhode Island*

[The opinions are those of the letter-writer and not of the United States government.]

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Gabriel Schoenfeld's article on CNN's cold-war lies with great interest. It is amazing what TV will do—great technical virtuosity combined with mindlessness.

The series is not, however, the only example of how historians have let their biases affect their narratives. Recently Thomas Cargill and I looked at the way high-school history textbooks treat the Great Depression, and found that the discussion was strongly biased and totally out of line with modern scholarship. I wonder in how many other cases popularizations by historians are spreading misinformation.

THOMAS MAYER
*University of California
Davis, California*

TO THE EDITOR:

I salute Gabriel Schoenfeld for his eloquent account of the flaws in CNN's *Cold War*. His article raises the question of competition: why is there not a visually appealing account of the cold war written by the "good guys"? Somewhere out there right now, someone has the talent to execute such a project. And surely, there is another someone who is rich enough to fund it. If the truth is to win out, some of us had better get into the popular-culture battle or we will leave the field to CNN and others

whose agenda does not serve the truth.

RUSSELL ROBERTS
*John M. Olin School of
Business
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri*

TO THE EDITOR:

"Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War" was enlightening, but I wonder whether a different title might have helped readers grasp the theme more easily. Gabriel Schoenfeld's essential point is that the CNN series commits the revisionist mistake of seeing the adversaries in the cold war as morally equivalent. Perhaps Mr. Schoenfeld might have called the article, as he writes on his last page, "Truman and Reagan Had It Right: The Soviet Union Was an Evil Empire."

Congratulations on a splendid article.

JACKSON TOBY
*Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

TO THE EDITOR:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's "Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War" is an especially acute, balanced, and probing account of the CNN version of Soviet-American relations. In a cultural environment in which the writing of history has been superseded in part by the televising of ideology as history, such a statement becomes necessary. Thumbs up for Mr. Schoenfeld's razor-sharp critique.

IRVING LOUIS HOROWITZ
*Rutgers University
New Brunswick, New Jersey*

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD writes:

CNN's promotional material boasts that John Lewis Gaddis and Vladislav M.

Zubok "commented on every outline, every rough-cut, every final script" in order to keep the documentary to the "ascertainable truth." Among the historical advisers, Mr. Gaddis read "every word" of the book accompanying the show.

Mr. Gaddis now states that he only "consulted on the television series and, to a lesser extent, the printed materials associated with it." He did not, he avers, "have editorial control" of any part of the project. Though there are some things he "would have done differently," he declines to spell out what they are.

It would have been most interesting to learn precisely what Mr. Gaddis would have done differently and why. Certainly, in the article he wrote about the series for the "Ideas" page of the *New York Times* earlier this year (January 9), one finds no trace of the unspecified reservations he now claims to entertain. To judge by that article and his present reticence, he appears to be a very faithful "consultant."

Given the huge discrepancy between Mr. Gaddis's own evolving views as set forth in his published works and the revisionist line taken in the CNN film and book, my own hunch is that the network's publicists and producers were more interested in capitalizing on Mr. Gaddis's sterling reputation as a scholar than on his sterling scholarly judgment. Why he allowed his good name to be associated with such a scandalous product I cannot say. I find myself mildly heartened that he now disclaims responsibility for the *Cold War* series. At the same time, I am profoundly disheartened that a Yale professor would say he

is "proud" to be associated with a product that negates his own best work. Or perhaps, as Mr. Gaddis suggests, I have "naively" misunderstood all the subtle distinctions involved in the consulting business.

Mr. Zubok begins his letter promisingly by stating that as a freedom-and-democracy-loving Russian, he is "with" me. But then, evidently donning his consultant's hat, he proceeds to express reservations about the "many axes" I grind against "peaceniks," revisionist historians, Ted Turner, and the like. In particular, he disputes the idea that there was an anti-American "conspiracy" in the way the film came to be produced.

This criticism is baffling. Though I speak of an anti-American mindset, the word "conspiracy" does not appear in my article at all, and

I am mystified by Mr. Zubok's motive in attributing it to me. But then, no less mystifying is his eagerness to *concur* with me on another matter—namely, "that *Cold War* should have highlighted more the massive Soviet penetration of the United States before and during World War II." While I welcome his solidarity, he is agreeing with me on a point I never made or even touched upon.

That so careless a reader and writer served CNN as one "responsible for facts (if not all the judgments)" leaves me with a better understanding of the origins of at least some of the documentary's numerous foibles and flaws.

Sir Jeremy Isaacs's resourceful letter is another kettle of fish entirely, complete with piranhas. It is, I admit, a kind of honor to be

poked at as "the Galahad of our day" or even a "Don Quixote" by so worthy a British knight. And it is also a relief to find here no easy attempt to escape censure with the excuse that one was merely serving as Ted Turner's hired horseman.

To begin with, Sir Jeremy suggests (in words echoed by Mr. Zubok) that mine is a simpleminded version of history, in which a perfectly virtuous West triumphs over a thoroughly iniquitous East. The world, he corrects me, "does not easily divide into goodies and baddies as children's games, ancient Hollywood myths, and now COMMENTARY would have it."

The form of humor employed here has a name: it is called caricature, and it fails to meet my argument. In my article I took special cognizance of what I called

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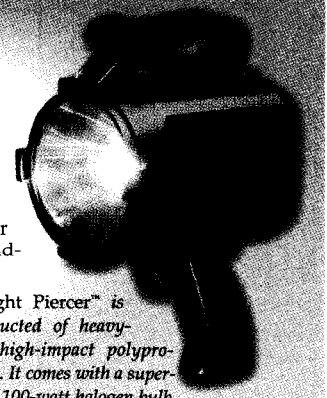
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the "moral ambiguities of the cold war." On some occasions, I wrote, the United States and its allies "took actions that were questionable, even highly questionable; on some, rare occasions, they took actions that were indefensible and wrong." Does this sound like a conception of a world composed solely of "goodies and baddies"?

But it is one thing to recognize shades of gray in what was a great moral contest. It is another thing entirely to blur the distinction between black and white or even attempt to erase it entirely, as the CNN documentary does throughout. Consider in this context the question of Soviet terror. Although *tu quoque* is not an argument, the fact is that Sir Jeremy is himself baldly misrepresenting when he alleges that I misrepresent both documentary and book. Citing a number of extremely vivid passages that accurately characterize the scale and scope of the Soviet nightmare, he then complains: "How can Mr. Schoenfeld claim that my colleagues and I treat the two cold-war great powers as moral equals?"

The answer is very simple. Contrary to Sir Jeremy's letter, I never said that the extent of Stalin's terror (Lenin's terror is something else) was "seriously understated in documentary and book"—in fact, I offer him a bottle of the finest Siberian vodka (distilled from pre-revolutionary potatoes) if he can document otherwise. Indeed, I specifically cited some of the very passages from the book that Sir Jeremy now asserts I ignored ("the Soviet Union endured far worse . . ."; "McCarthyism, and every

other American hysteria, paled in comparison to the paranoia that permeated the Soviet system . . ."), singling them out as "perfectly valid points." I then proceeded to show how these perfectly valid points are vitiated by the portrayal of America as a society in the throes of its own homegrown version of totalitarianism.

In this portrayal, both film and book apply Soviet-style words and phrases to the United States: "torture," "persecution," "purge," "inquisition," and finally, "Great Fear"—a Fear in which "neighbors were encouraged to spy on one another. Parents were asked to inform on their children, children on their parents," etc. It was on the basis of (among many other things) this terminologically loaded comparison of the Stalin and McCarthy periods that I found Sir Jeremy's documentary guilty of treating "the two cold-war great powers as moral equals."

Nor is this the only issue Sir Jeremy dodges, whether willfully or inadvertently (I too know which is worse). Consider the project's version of the founder of Soviet Communism, Vladimir Ilych Lenin. My charge was hardly, as Sir Jeremy summarizes it, that "there is not much" about Lenin. On the contrary, I would contend that *too much* is said about Lenin in both documentary and book, including passages in which Sir Jeremy describes the Soviet dictator's "deep commitment to bettering the lives of ordinary Russians," or declares that Lenin's "socialist principles were meant to ensure decent education, free health care, common ownership of land, and fairness for all." To anyone remote-

ly familiar with Lenin's bloody thoughts and deeds, it is not difficult to see why Sir Jeremy should now shun mention of these indefensibly pink passages.

Sir Jeremy also accuses me of slurring a whole battalion of CIA officers. I thought it was clear that, in characterizing the American side as represented by a gaggle of ex-CIA thugs, I was referring only to the film's episode on Angola and Latin America. In the other episodes he tosses in—those devoted to Afghanistan and to espionage—very different sorts of problems arise. The idea, for example, that the USSR entered Afghanistan in 1979 only to keep other countries out—i.e., that it was acting "defensively"—is the dominant thrust of show and book alike; it is also an interpretation so highly questionable as to border on outright falsehood. But as with many other points I raised and discussed, Sir Jeremy prefers here to tilt at a windmill of his own design.

Finally, Sir Jeremy calls the title of my article, "Twenty-Four Lies About the Cold War," a "travesty," because I "signally fail to indict book or series for even one" lie. But if his hagiographic treatment of Lenin is not a lie, a "deliberate historical falsification," and itself a travesty, what is? Another lie (or perhaps two-in-one) is the documentary's portrayal of the cold war in Angola and Latin America. Yet another is its rendition of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Thomas M. Nichols's letter brings to our attention a couple of more subtle but equally damning fabrications that had escaped my notice. Given the

space, I could easily arrive at or exceed the total of 24 lies specified in my article's title—one for each hour-long episode of the show.

In addition to Mr. Nichols, I thank Eric Rauchway, Thomas Mayer, Russell Roberts, Jackson Toby, and Irving Louis Horowitz for their kind words. I also sincerely thank my very talented critics. I have read and admired many of John Lewis Gaddis's articles and books, and Sir Jeremy Isaacs's *The World at War* is a classic documentary that will never be surpassed. The riveting visual imagery and the stirring music and narration of *Cold War* once again demonstrate his formidable powers. All the greater pity that it is such a profoundly flawed work, on so profoundly important a subject.

The Pope & the Holocaust

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich's article, "The Pope, the Church, and the Jews" [April], should be welcomed by Catholics as a constructive contribution to the ongoing dialogue envisioned and called for by *We Remember*, the Holy See's recent document on the Shoah. Still, I would like to raise a few of what I consider the more salient points needing further dialogue.

First, Mr. Wistrich appears to ascribe to Augustine the origins of the ancient (and contemptible) charge of deicide. I think if he pursues the patristic record a bit further, he will find that the (false) notion

that the Jews were collectively guilty for the death of Jesus predated Augustine. While Augustine did not directly challenge this pernicious accusation, what he did with it was, in historical retrospect, quite remarkable. He argued that despite it, Jews were to be not only tolerated but protected in Christian Europe, since they witnessed to the truth of divine revelation contained in the Hebrew Scriptures, which was necessary for acceptance of the truth of the Gospels. Beginning with Pope St. Gregory the Great and continuing through the Middle Ages, this became official Church policy.

Second, Mr. Wistrich seems to believe that the "proliferation" of crosses "on the grounds" of Auschwitz was orchestrated by the

Polish Catholic Church. Not so. The Polish episcopate has vigorously and publicly opposed this move by a few dissident Catholics and has called for the crosses' removal, as has the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

Third, Mr. Wistrich places the Holy See's statement on the Shoah in opposition to the earlier statements of the various European bishops' conferences. This is to misread the way the Catholic hierarchy functions. As Cardinal Cassidy, who was responsible for *We Remember*, has indicated, one of the reasons for the Holy See's delay in issuing its statement was to allow local hierarchies to speak first in relation to the specific realities of their own

local histories. The statements of the French and German bishops were commendably strong and direct, as Mr. Wistrich acknowledges. Statements were also issued by the bishops of Hungary, Poland, Holland, the U.S., Switzerland, and Italy. The "universal" declaration of the Holy See was thus intended to be read in the light of the very specific statements of repentance from local churches.

Fourth, the historical works listed by Mr. Wistrich as being critical of Pope Pius XII's activities during the Shoah are conveniently selective and curiously dated, all going back some twenty or 30 years. More recent scholarship on the Church and the Holocaust—like Michael Mar-
rus's *The Holocaust in Histo-*

ry (1987) and John Pawlikowski's "The Legacy of Pius XII," *Catholic International*, October 1998—presents a far more nuanced picture. I would be curious, for example, to know Mr. Wistrich's source for his startling statement that "as late as 1943, Pius XII hoped for a German victory against the Russians."

Finally, Mr. Wistrich argues that *We Remember* endorses the view "that the Church as an institution was blameless during the Shoah." This is to misread a theological distinction. The document does distinguish between the Church as a human institution, on the one hand, and the Church as a sacramental, transcendent reality, "the Mystical Body of Christ," on the other. This is a classical Cath-

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olic distinction not found in Protestantism. It is the latter theological reality that the document quite understandably holds "blameless" from the sins of the Church's human members. But the Church as a human institution, the document teaches, can and must be held accountable for the sins of omission and commission of its members over the centuries and during the Shoah.

In issuing and commenting on *We Remember*, Cardinal Cassidy has been quite clear that it should not in any sense be read, as Mr. Wistrich suggests, as "the Church's final word" on the Shoah, but only as the beginning of the process of dialogue between Catholics and Jews so ably represented by Mr. Wistrich's own article.

EUGENE J. FISHER
*Secretariat for Ecumenical
and Interreligious Affairs
National Conference of
Catholic Bishops
Washington, D.C.*

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich offers a sober account of the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust. But some of what he wrote demands a rebuttal.

Mr. Wistrich says that it is an "unconvincing and inflated claim in *We Remember* that Pius XII and his representatives saved hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives." Yet in the work of the Israeli scholar Pinchas Lapide, the Pope is credited with saving as many as 860,000 Jewish lives.

While reasonable people can disagree about the exact number of lives saved, there is no evidence to refute the conclusion of Hitler biographer John Toland.

Writing of events in 1943, Toland asserts:

The Church, under the Pope's guidance, had already saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions, and rescue organizations combined, and was presently hiding thousands of Jews in monasteries, convents, and Vatican City itself.

Indeed, nowhere in all of Europe did more Jews survive than in Italy, the Vatican's home, where 85 percent were spared Nazi terror.

When Pius XII died in 1958, his heroism was duly noted by virtually every Jewish organization in the world, from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to the World Jewish Congress.

Mr. Wistrich claims that Pius XII made just "one public reference to the Shoah" and that this statement "has often been cited by the Pope's apologists to demonstrate that he was not 'silent.'" The source of this "single sentence," according to Mr. Wistrich, was the Pope's 1942 Christmas message.

If Mr. Wistrich is right, how does he explain the *New York Times* editorial of Christmas day, 1941? In it, the *Times* said, "The voice of Pius XII is a lonely voice in the silence and darkness enveloping Europe this Christmas." The following year, on Christmas day, the *Times* remarked, "This Christmas more than ever he [Pius XII] is a lonely voice crying out of the silence of a continent."

But if Pius XII was not vocal enough, and if this is seen as an example of his insensitivity to Jews, then

what are we to make of his alleged silence regarding the fate of Catholics? After all, most of the five million "others" who died in the Holocaust were Catholics. Does this mean that Pius XII was insensitive to Catholics because he did not trumpet his objections to the media?

Mr. Wistrich notes that Pius XII's defenders argue that public denunciations would have made matters worse, as happened when the Dutch bishops railed against Hitler in 1942. He then claims that "Whether this was really so must remain an unresolved question, at least until the Vatican archives are opened to independent investigation."

But it is a matter of historical record that as a direct result of the Dutch bishops' open condemnation of Hitler, more Jews were deported to death camps from the Netherlands than from any other nation. Indeed, prior to this condemnation, the Nazis had exempted the deportation of baptized Jews. But not afterward. Among those who died as a result was the Jewish-born Carmelite nun, Edith Stein.

Regarding the Vatican archives, it is time to put this matter to rest. Years ago the Vatican published eleven volumes of documents on the Holocaust. Just last December, chief Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls stated, "This exhaustive selection of documents from the Vatican archives allows it to be said that there is nothing—I repeat nothing—to add to what has already been published." If Mr. Wistrich has evidence to the contrary, he should say so.

Mr. Wistrich gives Pope

John Paul II credit for improving Catholic-Jewish relations. That is something we can all agree on. And the better these relations, the better this world will be for all of us.

WILLIAM A. DONOHUE
*Catholic League for Religious
and Civil Rights
New York City*

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich provides an interesting analysis of what the Catholic Church did *not* do during the Holocaust; he is hardly concerned with what the Catholic Church *did*. At the same time, his article reflects a basic unfamiliarity with the objective evidence that explains why it was impossible for Pope Pius XII to do more than he did in that horrible period of history.

What is disturbing about the article is its acceptance of authors—Carlo Falcone, Saul Friedländer, Friedrich Heer, Guenther Lewy, and John Morley—whose dubious interpretations have been demolished by reviewers over the past generation. Most of these authors either allowed their objectivity to be clouded or failed to make use of the relevant documentation that the Holy See has published on the victims of the war. If Mr. Wistrich himself had made use of these documents, he would have come up with plenty of evidence to avoid falling into the quicksands of fiction, innuendo, and myth.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wistrich's historical methodology leaves very much to be desired. He has picked up as his own what was a fictional, not a historical, thesis ("Pius XII as a man of almost criminal weakness and indifference in the face

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of Hitler's war against the Jews") from *The Deputy*, the 1963 play by Rolf Hochhuth. Without testing that view against the evidence, Mr. Wistrich has accepted it as infallible truth.

In defending the Jews, Pius XII had, so to speak, one hand tied behind his back, since at the same time he was trying to defend the Catholic Church in its own titanic struggle for survival against the Nazis. That Adolf Hitler had been carrying on a war against Catholics while he was carrying on one against the Jews is completely foreign to the consciousness of Mr. Wistrich, who argues as if the Pope's major obligation was to help the Jews.

Just as the outside world did not understand the full extent of the magnitude of the war against the Jews until after the defeat of Hitler, so too it did not know how widespread and lethal had been the Nazi war against the Catholic Church. Twenty-four hundred Catholic priests were imprisoned at Dachau, including 850 Polish priests who perished; 780 priests died at Mauthausen and 300 more at Sachsenhausen. In Germany, thousands of priests were harassed, interrogated, and jailed, if not killed.

That Pius XII was able in these circumstances to accomplish all that he did to help the Jews is, to say the least, truly remarkable, since it exceeds what any other nation or agency did to help. Obviously, that accounts for the praise conferred on Pius XII by Jewish leaders. At the time of the Pope's death in 1958, Golda Meir, in her capacity as foreign minister of Israel, declared, "When we were suffering martyrdom,

the voice of the Pope was raised in our defense." Years earlier, in the midst of World War II, Albert Einstein remarked, "Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler's campaign for suppressing the truth."

Mr. Wistrich gives the credit for saving so many Jews not so much to Pius XII as to individual Catholics who had the courage to risk their lives. But no less a person than Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII who, as the papal representative in Istanbul during World War II, issued baptismal certificates to protect Jews, declared that those actions were carried out at the direction of the Pope. This was also the case with other papal representatives and with those who provided places of refuge in convents, monasteries, schools, and other enclaves under the control of the Catholic Church in Europe.

As for Mr. Wistrich's comments on the Pope's alleged failure to speak out, it is not clear that Jewish leaders wanted words as much as actions from Pius XII. As Marcus Melchior, chief rabbi of Denmark, declared, "If the Pope had spoken out, Hitler would have probably massacred more than six million Jews and perhaps ten times ten million Catholics."

The time has come to put an end to raising obstacles to a genuine dialogue between Catholics and Jews by constantly bringing up issues that hinder good relations.

[REVEREND] VINCENT A. LAPOMARDA, S.J.
Coordinator, Holocaust Collection
College of the Holy Cross
Worcester, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Pope Pius XII warned the world about the consequences of Nazi policies and responded as best he could to suffering people throughout Europe. Despite the wealth of evidence proving Pius XII's innocence and heroism, one of the biggest lies of our time—that the Pope was "silent" about Hitler's efforts to exterminate the Jewish people—continues. Robert S. Wistrich's unconscionable article is a case in point. Responses to many of Mr. Wistrich's allegations can be found in my two-part article in *Inside the Vatican* magazine (January, March 1999) as well as in my forthcoming book, *Pius XII: Architect for Peace*. In addition, over 5,000 documents on the Holocaust in the Vatican archives substantiate my findings and should be consulted by historians and scholars.

It is time to place the blame for the Holocaust where it belongs. Anti-Semitism is inconsistent with the basic tenets of Christianity. *We Remember* reminds us that all peoples shared responsibility for the Holocaust.

[SISTER] MARGHERITA MARCHIONE
Religious Teachers Filippini
Morristown, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich provides a very superficial discussion of Pope Pius XII's actions during World War II. He seems quite familiar with authors who are critical of Pius XII. But why does he not discuss authors like Pinchas Lapide, Jeno Levai, Paul Duclos, Jean Toulat, M. Maccarone, Charles Klein, François Charles-Roux, Michael O'Carroll, Anthony Rhodes, Owen

Chadwick, Joseph Lichten, Harold Deutsch, Vincent A. Lapomarda, Henri De Lubac, Margherita Marchione, Robert Graham, and Pierre Blet, who defend the Pope? (Lapide, Levai, and Lichten are Jews.)

Mr. Wistrich is wrong to argue that, "as late as 1943, Pius XII hoped for a German victory against the Russians." Volume two of the Vatican documents is a complete collection of the Pope's secret letters to the German bishops. In letter after letter, he never expressed any preference for Nazi Germany over the Soviet Union. Indeed, the Nazis wanted the Pope publicly to bless their invasion of the Soviet Union, and were bitterly disappointed when he refused.

During audiences granted to Italian Ambassador Dr. Bernardo Attolico in 1941, Spanish Foreign Minister Ramon Serrano-Sunyer in 1942, and Hungarian Premier Nicholas Kallay in 1943, the Pope was quoted as saying that the Nazis were far worse than the Soviets, and that a Nazi victory would mean the end of Christianity in Europe.

In response to Pius XII's 1942 Christmas message, which Mr. Wistrich dismisses as vague, the Reich Central Security Office on January 22, 1942, complained:

In a manner never known before, the Pope has repudiated the National Socialist New European Order. . . . Here he is virtually accusing the German people of injustice toward the Jews, and makes himself the mouthpiece of the Jewish war criminals.

In his June 2, 1943 address to the College of Cardinals, Pius XII spoke of

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those persons "tormented as they are, because of their nationality or race . . . [and] delivered, without any fault on their part, to measures of extermination."

We Catholics continue to defend Pius XII because we think the allegations against him are baseless, and made by those who wish to attack the Catholic Church. Perhaps Mr. Wistrich should explain why the Pope remains an obsession for many Jewish organizations that once extolled his virtues.

DIMITRI CAVALLI
Bronx, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

Those who believe that Pope Pius XII was a brave and compassionate leader of his church are too frequently left on the defensive by articles such as Robert S. Wistrich's. One could, point by point, refute Mr. Wistrich's allegations, and yet a casual reader would still come away with the impression that something was being hidden. As such, I propose that those who believe that Pius XII was morally corrupt address the following facts.

Pius XII ordered his bishops around the world to do what they could to help Jewish victims of the Nazis; authorized the distribution of falsified baptismal certificates so that Jews could avoid deportation; ordered that Vatican buildings be opened to Jewish refugees when the Germans occupied Rome; cooperated in an attempted coup to overthrow Hitler; and sent advance military knowledge about German plans to Allied nations.

In Vichy France, when Papal Nuncio Valeri contacted Marshal Pétain, de-

manding that the deportation of Jews end, Pétain said: "I hope that the Pope understands my attitude in these difficult circumstances." The nuncio replied: "It is precisely that which the Pope cannot understand." Vatican Radio then condemned "this scandal . . . the treatment of the Jews." A headline in the August 27, 1942, edition of the *New York Times* reported: "Vichy Seizes Jews; Pope Pius Ignored."

These points do not even begin to scratch the surface when it comes to the wartime efforts of Pius XII. After they have been debated, let us address the next set, and then the next. No one knows the details of the secret maneuvers, acts, and thoughts of the man who led the Catholic Church during these dark hours. We do, however, know enough to say that any allegation that he sympathized with Hitler or was callously indifferent to the plight of the Jews is so far off of character as to be invalid on its face.

RONALD J. RYCHLAK
*University of Mississippi
School of Law
University of Mississippi*

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich repeats some of the horrendous calumnies concerning Pius XII that continue to be spread in the Jewish community, and about which the Vatican's statement on the Shoah justly complains. Without adducing proof, Mr. Wistrich concludes that the Pope did not do everything he could have done on behalf of the victims of the Holocaust.

In his book, *Three Popes and the Jews* (1967), Pinchas Lapide made the following

observation about attempts to revise the historical truth concerning Pius XII:

Unable to cure the sickness of an entire civilization, and unwilling to bear the brunt of Hitler's fury, the Pope, unlike many far mightier than he, alleviated, relieved, retrieved, appealed, petitioned, and saved as best he could by his own lights. Who, but a prophet or a martyr, could have done more?

In the same vein, Jeno Levai stated:

It is a particularly regrettable irony that the one person [Pius XII] in all of occupied Europe who did more than anyone else to halt the dreadful crime and alleviate its consequences is today made the scapegoat for the failures of others.

It is time to stop the unjust denigration of the sacred memory of a great Pope, and for Catholics and Jews to join in a genuine truth-seeking, healing process.

FRANK J. PINO
Jamesburg, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

Though providing much insight on Catholic-Jewish relations, Robert S. Wistrich nevertheless downplays the tremendous progress made by Catholics in acknowledging and atoning for their sins of anti-Semitism. Yes, much still needs be done, such as opening Vatican World War II records and ridding the Gospels of blatant anti-Semitism, but why not applaud Church leaders for how far they have come?

To suggest, as Mr. Wistrich does, that the Church's handling of some Holocaust

issues has been "less than felicitous" is a bit much. He criticizes the Church for canonizing Edith Stein. But what business is it of Jews to determine who Catholic saints are? Why impugn Vatican views of the Holocaust because of some Polish actions at Auschwitz, as if somehow the Pope approved of them or as if he could command the instant obedience of every religious believer? Why the absence of any sensitivity to Catholic feelings about the American Jews who climbed over the walls of the nunnery at Auschwitz, or to the desire of Catholics to commemorate Christians who died at Auschwitz, however few their number?

Certainly the Vatican's statement on the Holocaust is deserving of criticism, which Mr. Wistrich perceptively presents, but in no way does it warrant his saying it is the Church's "final word on the subject." Neither the Pope nor Cardinal Cassidy has ever said so.

While Mr. Wistrich's analysis of Pius XII's record is valid, I sometimes wonder just how much criticism the Vatican and Pius XII deserve. At their worst, I would not put them high among those—like the United States, England, France, Canada, and the American Jewish community itself—who could have done more in protecting, rescuing, and welcoming Jews.

Unfortunately, context and proportionality are missing from Mr. Wistrich's article. I say this not to lessen the guilt of the Church or European Catholics, but to prevent the diminution of the paramount guilt of Nazi Germany. Yes, as Mr. Wistrich

states, repentance and a willingness to change are necessary, but equally important is recognition of changed behaviors. In the case of John Paul II and the American hierarchy, these have been most impressive, however belated or inadequate.

PHILIP PERLMUTTER
Newton, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich writes:

... nor is it wrong to draw a distinction between Christian and Nazi anti-Semitism. But the difference is hardly absolute. It is rather, as Milton Himmelfarb once observed, like that between an uncomfortable fever and a lethal one—they are two variants of the same sickness.

Normally a careful scholar, this time Mr. Wistrich has neglected to check. He relies on his (wishful?) memory and transforms my "another kind altogether" ("No Hitler, No Holocaust," COMMENTARY, March 1984) into "the same."

MILTON HIMMELFARB
White Plains, New York

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to thank Robert S. Wistrich for the fairness, clear distinctions, and balance he has introduced into the discussion of *We Remember*, the Vatican document of repentance in the face of the Shoah.

I am not certain that I agree with every step in his argument (I am not so learned in the details as he), but at each step he does display the issues and the evidence that make further discussion promising.

I am especially grateful

You deserve a factual look at...

The Arabs of Israel

Are they a "persecuted minority?"

The world is much focused on the developments in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and the Gaza Strip, in which, for the most part, Israel has relinquished sovereignty and authority to the Palestinian Authority (P.A.). Ninety-eight percent of the Arabs in these territories live now under the rule of the P.A. There is some question whether or not they are better off than before. But many believe that Arabs in Israel itself are a "persecuted minority."

What are the facts?

Israel is a Democratic Country. Israel is an open, pluralistic, and egalitarian society. Different religions, cultures, and social traditions coexist. Protection of such diversity is embedded in Israel's traditions and confirmed by the government. About 20% of the population (over one million people) are non-Jews, most of them Arabs, and some Druze. Like all other Israeli citizens, they have full rights to vote and to hold elective office. Both Arabs and Druze hold seats in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Every Knesset, since the founding of the State in 1948, has had Arab and Druze members. All transactions in the Knesset are simultaneously translated into Arabic, and Arab members may address the Knesset in Arabic.

It is official policy of the Israeli government to foster the language, culture, and traditions of the Arab minority, in the educational system and in daily life. Arabic is an official language in Israel, together with Hebrew. Israel's Arabic press is the most vibrant and independent of any country in the region. There are more than 20 Arabic periodicals. They publish what they please, subject only to the same military censorship as Jewish publications. There are daily TV and radio programs in Arabic. Arabic is taught in Jewish secondary schools. Israeli universities are renowned centers of learning in the history and literature of the Arab Middle East.

Education and literacy of the Arab population in Israel is as high as and probably higher than in any Arab country. The literacy rate among Israeli Arabs is 95%, virtually the same as for Israeli Jews. There are close to 1,000 Arab educational institutions in Israel, with about 300,000 students—just about 25 times as many as in 1948, when the State of Israel was created,

Ninety percent of Arab children attend school, probably the highest ratio of any Arab population anywhere. Israeli universities and technical institutions are freely available to the Arabs. About 5,000 Arab students attend such schools.

Israeli Arabs Enjoy Full Equality in Law and in Fact. All religious communities in Israel enjoy the full protection of the State. Israeli Arabs—Moslems, as well as many Christian denominations—are free to exercise their faiths, to observe their own weekly day of rest and holidays, and to administer their own internal affairs. Each community has its own religious councils and courts, and has full jurisdiction over religious affairs, including matters of personal status, such as marriage and divorce. The holy sites of all religions are

administered by their own authorities and protected by the government. In contrast to the non-Israeli Arab world, Arab women in Israel enjoy the same status as men. Israeli law grants

"Contrary to propaganda...the Arabs in Israel enjoy every civil right and have the same status under law as Jewish Israelis."

women equal rights, including the right to vote and to be elected to public office, prohibits polygamy, child marriage, and the barbarity of female sexual mutilation. It has thus vastly changed the status of women, to far above that of any country in the region. Israeli health standards are by far the highest in the Middle East. Israeli health institutions are freely open to all Arabs, on the same basis as they are to Jews.

There is, however, one difference between the "rights" of Arabs and Jews in Israel. Israeli and Druze men are required to do three years of military service and then serve one month every year until they are 50. Arabs are exempted from military duty and are not required to perform any compensating civilian service. Since the surrounding Arab states, with the exceptions of Egypt and recently of Jordan, are the avowed enemies of Israel and are dedicated to its destruction, this exemption is granted by the Israeli government to its Arab citizens, so as to spare them conflicts of loyalty and conscience.

Contrary to propaganda and to what many believe, the Arabs in Israel are full-fledged citizens, enjoy every civil right, and have the same status in law as Jewish Israelis. In summary, they enjoy the highest standards of living and liberty of any Arabs in the Middle East. It is instructive and sobering to compare the condition of the approximately one million Arabs in Israel with that of the pitiful remnants of Jewry in Arab countries. Jews have been living in Arab countries for almost 2,000 years. Under Arab dominance, they were always third-class citizens and subject to harassment and persecution. There were about 900,000 Jews in Arab countries in 1946—now there are fewer than 25,000. But there are now over one million Arabs in Israel, as against 150,000 in 1948—an almost seven-fold increase. These figures alone would seem to prove that things can't be all that bad for Arabs in Israel.

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for the way in which Mr. Wistrich guides the discussion of Pius XII into the ethics of practical wisdom or prudence. He carefully gives Pius XII credit for several good things he did do, and sets aside several extreme but unsustainable charges.

I for one deeply wish that Pius XII had done more, and more dramatically, relying on the power of God's grace and the clarifying effect of moral witness. Had he done so, he would be deeply honored today, and the Catholic people would rejoice in his deed. Pius XII, on the record, did not lack courage, but he was temperamentally a very prudent, even cautious, man.

The record also seems to show that he was asking himself many of the prudential questions raised by Mr. Wistrich: Have I in fact done everything I might have done? Would it make a difference if I took a firm public stand, launched public condemnations of certain actions by particular leaders (Hitler, Ante Pavelic in Croatia, Josef Tiso in Slovakia, etc.)? Will greater harm than good result in leading the Catholic people into open opposition? Would I unleash a still greater public ferocity, and place consciences under intolerable stress?

It seems to me fair to argue, as Mr. Wistrich does, that the Pope did not show enough courage and did not take enough risks and did not use all the public leverage he had. My own inclinations run that way.

Still, I fear that it is too easy today, at a safe distance and with the clarity afforded by the later unfolding of unpredictable events, as well as by decades of scholarship

on documents not then available, to demand of Pius XII a courage that, in his place, I might not in fact have been able to muster, or a prudential clarity that at that time must have been difficult beyond belief. Perhaps further study of the archives of many nations will show that Mr. Wistrich's harder judgment is warranted. It is wise for Catholics to be able to face the worst. Truth is truth.

On the other side, note how strong a pope John Paul II is, and observe how forthright he is in condemning abortion while large percentages of Catholics, as justly described as "devout Catholics" as those Mr. Wistrich writes of in Germany, Croatia, France, Slovakia, Belgium, and elsewhere in the 1940's, decline to heed his words. I suspect—I know for a fact—that modern popes have a restrained view of how much "moral power" they actually have, compared with the power non-Catholics tend to endow them with. Modern popes have no more moral power than people, individually, freely yield them. Very large proportions of Catholics who go to church regularly do not necessarily even hear, let alone follow, what popes teach. Thus, I found Mr. Wistrich's paragraph on the positive effects of stronger statements by Pius XII his least convincing. My own argument would stress their beneficent long-term effects, not their positive impact at the time. But I cannot be sure that Mr. Wistrich is not right.

The fact that John Paul II so strongly defends the reputation of Pius XII warns me that archival material, and not only the Vatican's,

may turn the judgment of history again, in a way favorable to Pius XII. Mr. Wistrich does not mention, for example, the records in the British Foreign Office, which indicate that Pius XII was early on willing to risk his entire papacy as a mediator between the British and key German generals conspiring against Hitler to seek peace.

On another point: there is a terminological quirk in statements of Catholic faith wholly obscure to those attuned to normal usage. When Catholics in official documents distinguish between "the Church" and "its members," ordinary usage would take this to mean "the institutional Church, the leaders" versus "rank-and-file believers." Mr. Wistrich interprets *We Remember* so; and if this usage had been intended, his point would be correct: viz., that it is wrong to say the Pope, cardinals, and bishops of the time were without fault and only ordinary believers sinned.

However, the conventional theological meaning of the text is that human beings in the Church, including bishops, cardinals, and popes, do in fact sin. But that part of the Church which is its participation in the divine life, its justification for being, its criterion of good and evil, and its hope, cannot and does not sin. Put another way, God remains faithful to his Covenant with the Church even when humans do not.

It is the noblest part of Mr. Wistrich's article that he himself alludes to a standard very like this. He avers that the Vatican should not be judged as a political unit like all others, intent only on its self-interests ("What's

in it for the Catholics?"), but must be judged in the light of the divine representation it claims to serve. Those claims shed a harsh light, indeed.

Catholics have nothing to fear from finding Pius XII at fault, if that is the ultimate verdict of dispassionate scholarship. The task is to judge all the facts fairly, and I thank Mr. Wistrich for moving the discussion closer toward that point.

MICHAEL NOVAK
American Enterprise Institute
Washington, D.C.

TO THE EDITOR:

Robert S. Wistrich's fair-minded but relentless examination proved painful reading. I could mount a defense, pointing out medieval popes who protected Jews, or citing some of the extensive and detailed defenses of Pius XII's actions and silences. But others can do that better and, anyway, we would still have to confront a terrible legacy. Whatever answers we reach to "what-if" questions, and however favorable the judgment we accord the wartime Pope, nothing would change the reality Mr. Wistrich so implacably describes and which John Paul II laments: that the Church long contributed to the anti-Semitism that seeped into the 20th century, reaching its horrible fruition in historically Christian, largely Catholic, lands.

John Paul II has urged us to begin acknowledging this legacy, but Mr. Wistrich demands we face it now without flinching. Men are born to evil, but God's mercy is infinite to those who repent. This belief is basic to Catholicism. But the Holocaust revealed depths of evil of

which we would think ourselves incapable. We can imagine no forgiveness for Auschwitz and Treblinka or for their long preparation, and it tests our faith to hope that God would maintain His promises even here; better to soften our self-indictment rather than put Him to the test. Both repentance and reformation demand honesty; you cannot repent what you deny, and if we have any reason to hope that we would do better than our ancestors, it is because we know where their anti-Semitism led.

But how do we face the Jews after such acknowledgment? If it tests our faith to believe in God's mercy, it denies human experience to hope for forgiveness from men like ourselves. If we are truly to respect the Jews and their faith, as the Pope has urged us to do, including the "separate integrity of Jewish history" invoked by Mr. Wistrich, then we will worry less about our own image in Jewish eyes and more about reaching that day when, as he writes, "anti-Semitism will no longer hold a place in Christian hearts." Respect also demands, as he says, "an honest reckoning with the past." For his salutary reminder of this bitter truth, we owe Mr. Wistrich our thanks.

JAMES F. O'CALLAGHAN
Lomé, Togo

ROBERT S. WISTRICH
writes:

On the basis of these letters, an innocent reader might assume that my article was an all-out assault on Pope Pius XII's actions during World War II and the Holocaust. It was, of course, nothing of the kind. My aim was to provide as sober and fair-minded a critique of *We*

Remember—the Vatican document on the Shoah—as I could manage within the framework of a single essay. Had the document not twice praised the wartime Pope and what he "did personally or through his representatives to save hundreds of thousands of Jewish lives," I would not have commented on his record. But the Vatican document does not even hint at any controversy over Pius XII's conduct. Hence, the issue could not be ignored, even though it was by no means the central point of my essay.

I am grateful to Eugene J. Fisher for calling my article a "constructive contribution" to the ongoing dialogue between Catholics and Jews, but I believe that he has seriously misread or failed to answer a number of my points. First, I did not attribute the charge of deicide to Augustine but referred to his view that the Jews would eternally bear the mark of Cain—i.e., as a wandering, reprobate people condemned to exile. Second, I did not attribute the proliferation of crosses in Auschwitz to the Polish Church but to "local militant Catholics." Third, I find singularly unconvincing Mr. Fisher's explanation of why *We Remember* is so much more evasive than the statements of German, French, or Polish bishops. If the Vatican had adopted the spirit of these remarkably candid declarations, there would have been no sense of disappointment or crisis in Catholic-Jewish relations. Fourth, the historical works I listed in passing were merely intended to explain how Pius XII's negative image in historiography became fixed in the late

1960's. I am familiar with the work of Michael Marcus and John Pawlikowski, whose approach is, I believe, similar in spirit to my own.

Lastly, I am pleased to learn from Mr. Fisher that *We Remember* is not the Church's final word on the Shoah, but then I never assumed it was. I was referring to the disheartening prospect that the Vatican's final position on the Church's "errors and failures" would be to hold ordinary Christians responsible while maintaining that the institution itself was blameless. I now realize from Mr. Fisher's theological distinction between the Church as "the Mystical Body of Christ" and as a human institution that it is exactly as I feared.

Next, let me turn to William A. Donohue's "rebuttal," which recycles all the familiar arguments in the publications of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and in its various advertisements in the *New York Times*. Like many Catholics bent on rehabilitating Pius XII at all costs, he cites Pinchas Lapide's well-intentioned but decidedly unscholarly book of 1967, *Three Popes and the Jews*, to bolster the thesis that Pius XII saved as many as 860,000 Jewish lives. I know of no serious independent scholar who supports this figure, for which Lapide provided no convincing evidence. The same can be said of John Toland's claim, taken from Lapide, and not based on any original research. As for the high percentage of Italian Jews who survived the war, most historians, including Susan Zuccotti in her recent work *The Italians and the Holocaust*, argue that the bulk of the rescue efforts

were independent of the Vatican and Pius XII.

Mr. Donohue and a number of other correspondents make much of the kind words that Jewish leaders had for Pius XII, both immediately after the war and on his death in 1958. I find these tributes excessively generous but understandable given what was known at the time and the fact that Pius XII had saved some Jewish lives. But I believe it is a mistake to conclude from this that Jews were generally satisfied with Pius XII's efforts. The recent memoirs of Gerhard Riegner (a leading official of the World Jewish Congress during World War II) indicate the contrary, and also explain why Jewish leaders were reluctant to pressure Pius XII publicly: they were aware of his delicate position and anxious not to embarrass him. This is an issue on which much more research is required before we can leap to the conclusion Mr. Donohue wishes to draw.

Mr. Donohue and others are also noticeably eager to cite favorable editorials in the *New York Times* in 1941 and 1942 about Pius XII, as if that newspaper were the arbiter of moral judgments about historical figures—a very questionable assumption. Besides, taking any newspaper editorial in isolation, whether for or against the Pope, can hardly be said to constitute serious scholarship. Mr. Donohue then asks whether Pius XII was insensitive to Catholics who died during the war because of his "alleged silence" regarding their fate. Does he not realize that many Poles, including the Polish government in exile, were extremely bitter about

the Pope's failure adequately to condemn the Nazi murder of Poles during World War II, including a high percentage of the Polish clergy?

Even more extraordinary in my eyes, Mr. Donohue appears to agree with a Vatican spokesman whom he quotes as saying that there is nothing of any relevance in the Vatican archives that has not already been published. The issue of the Vatican archives is raised by many of the other correspondents as well. But one cannot settle the question of access by fiat and expect to be taken seriously. The volumes already published by the Holy See are indeed a valuable resource, but they were selected and edited by a group of scholars trusted and loyal to the Vatican. This is hardly consonant with the canons of independent, critical inquiry. Nor does such an approach lend itself to an authentic scholarly investigation of Pius XII's record, which I would have thought was in the interest of both Catholics and Jews.

To give him credit, Mr. Donohue does at least acknowledge the fact that I praise Pope John Paul II for his remarkable efforts to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. This is more than I can say for Sister Margherita Marchione, who appears to have been so blinded by her passion and zeal to rehabilitate Pius XII that she finds my article "unconscionable." Like a number of other oversensitive correspondents, she mistakes criticism for denigration and wrongly assumes that I claimed Pius XII was "silent" during the period. But as I made clear in my article, one must not confuse general condemnations of

the racism and the state idolatry of the Nazis (made by both Pius XI and Pius XII) with specific opposition to attacks on the Jews—opposition that Pius XII sadly failed to mount.

This brings me to Father Vincent A. Lapomarda, who accuses me—among other gross misreadings—of adopting Rolf Hochhuth's views as my own. But no objective reader could possibly imagine that I mistook what I described in my article as a "polemical, semi-documentary play" for historical reality. Similarly, I evoked authors like Lewy, Friedländer, Heer, Falcone, and Morley not because I relied on them as sources but as examples of the historical image of Pius XII in the late 1960's and early 1970's generated in part by the Hochhuth controversy. For Father Lapomarda to assume that I accepted this image as "infallible truth" tells me a great deal about his sloppy reading of texts. Worse still are his bombastic claims about the Catholic Church's "titanic struggle" against the Nazis and the parallel war Hitler was carrying on against Catholics. Certainly, Christians (including Catholics) were persecuted by the Nazis, and Father Lapomarda cites a few examples. But he does not ask himself either why Pius XII barely protested against the killing of Polish priests or whether such murders were in any case comparable to the attempted mass extermination of every Jewish man, woman, and child in Europe. Despite Father Lapomarda's efforts at historical "revisionism," the Holocaust was not a war against the Catholics, and for that he should be thankful.

A more serious point is

whether Pius XII deserves credit for the actions of those like Roncalli in Istanbul or Rotta in Budapest who intervened more forcefully on behalf of the Jews. It seems reasonable to assume that they acted with his (at least tacit) approval, which suggests a positive attitude to saving Jewish lives—something I never denied or sought to minimize. But that does not resolve the issue of Pius XII's public record any more than does the rather silly statement of the Chief Rabbi of Denmark. Hitler killed as many Jews as he could, but the idea that he intended to murder or could have murdered 100 million Catholics is simply preposterous.

The letters of Dimitri Cavalli, Ronald J. Rychlak, and Frank J. Pino are full of simplistic statements calling Pius XII a "brave," "heroic," and "compassionate" man, along with the apologetic arguments that constantly recur in the new cottage industry devoted to his unreserved rehabilitation. Mr. Cavalli quotes the propaganda of the Reich Main Security Office portraying Pius XII as "the mouthpiece of Jewish war criminals," as if this proved how pro-Jewish he really was. But if Nazi anti-Semitic paranoia is to be our criterion, then we are in serious trouble. At the same time, Mr. Cavalli apparently rejects the more sober reports of well-informed German diplomats who felt that Pius XII did in fact hope for a German victory against the Russians. Contrary to his assertion, there is plenty of evidence that Pius XII thought that Bolshevism was ultimately more dangerous to the Catholic Church than either Nazism or fascism.

Mr. Rychlak mentions Vichy France but omits a striking example from the autumn of 1941 when Léon Berard, French ambassador to the Holy See, sent a detailed report to Vichy on the Vatican's views. Berard pointed out that the Holy See was undisturbed by French anti-Semitic laws (which were draconian) and worried only that they might subvert church jurisdiction or be in breach of "justice and charity." Not surprisingly, the Pétain regime felt it had a green light from Rome to legislate against Jews as it pleased. Can one be astonished, then, that later, when the Vatican's posture shifted, Vichy chose to ignore Pius XII? I will leave fair-minded readers to judge if these and other facts dealt with in my article are appropriately termed "horrendous calumnies" or even "unjust denigration" (to use the rhetorical overkill of Mr. Pino).

Philip Perlmutter, like other correspondents, seems to have seriously misread the spirit of my remarks. At the beginning of my article I spoke of a "sea change" in Catholic attitudes to Jews and Judaism, specifically praising John Paul II. I even said that he "has done more to advance understanding between the two communities than did all his predecessors in the course of almost two millennia." And, despite my critique of *We Remember*, I commended both its tone and basic aims. What more does he want? Yet, while agreeing with much of my analysis, Mr. Perlmutter accuses me of downplaying the progress made, of ignoring American Jewish provocations of Catholics, and of lacking

To victims of Nazi persecution and their heirs who may have claims against Swiss Banks or other Swiss entities relating to the Holocaust:

Swiss banks agreed to pay \$1.25 billion U.S. dollars to settle legal claims relating to the World War II era conduct of Swiss banks, Swiss businesses, and the Swiss government ("Swiss Entities").

The United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York (the "Court") will hold a hearing on November 29, 1999, to decide whether the Settlement should be given final approval.

Note that you may be included even if you did not have a Swiss bank account, and that this Settlement is different from the Swiss Humanitarian Fund.

Who Is Affected by the Settlement

You are affected by the Settlement if you fit into one of the following five Settlement Classes. Four Classes consist of "Victims or Targets of Nazi Persecution" (any individual, business or group persecuted or targeted for persecution by the Nazi Regime or its agents, because they were or were believed to be Jewish, Romani, Jehovah's Witness, homosexual, or physically or mentally disabled or handicapped), AND who:

1. Had assets on deposit with any Swiss bank, investment fund, or other custodian, prior to May 9, 1945, OR
2. May have claims against Swiss Entities relating to assets looted or taken by the Nazi Regime*, OR
3. Performed slave labor for entities that may have deposited the revenues or proceeds of that labor with or transacted that profit through Swiss Entities, OR
4. Unsuccessfully sought entry into Switzerland to avoid Nazi persecution, or after gaining entry, were mistreated, and may have related claims against any Swiss Entity.

The fifth Settlement Class includes any individual, whether or not a Victim or Target of Nazi Persecution, who performed slave labor in a work site, wherever located, owned or controlled by a Swiss Entity.

All Settlement Classes include heirs and successors of the persons and entities described above.

Even if you're not sure whether you are a member of one of the Settlement Classes, you should request a Mailed Notice and Initial Questionnaire. For example, if you performed slave labor, you may not know whether revenue or proceeds of that labor were deposited with Swiss Entities; you may still be a Settlement Class member.

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No claims process or Plan of Allocation has yet been established. The Mailed Notice explains how you can make suggestions.

To receive further notice of a claims process, and ensure that you are able to file a claim, you must either mail a request for such notice to the address below, or complete and return the Initial Questionnaire attached to the Mailed Notice.

If the Court gives final approval of the Settlement, a Plan of Allocation will be adopted and the Fund will be disbursed. **Not all Settlement Class members who apply will be eligible to receive payments.**

If You Do Not Want to Participate

If you do not wish to participate in or be bound by the Settlement, you must exclude yourself by writing a letter so indicating, to the address given in the Mailed Notice, by October 22, 1999. If you do not, you will be barred from prosecuting any legal action against Swiss Entities relating to the settled disputes. If you exclude yourself, you will NOT be able to claim a portion of the Fund.

How to Comment or Object

You may comment on the terms of the Settlement by October 22, 1999. The Mailed Notice describes how to submit comments or objections. You have the right to appear at the November 29, 1999 hearing in person or through counsel, although you do not have to.

Who Represents You

The Court appointed attorneys as Settlement Class Counsel, and appointed Settlement Class Representatives, including Holocaust survivors, the World Jewish Restitution Organization ("WJRO"), and the World Council of Orthodox Jewish Communities. You do

not have to personally pay the Court appointed attorneys. Certain attorneys will apply to the Court for reimbursement of their costs, up to about .2% of the Fund. Certain Plaintiffs' attorneys will also apply for fees, up to at most 1.8% of the Fund. The Court may award a lower amount. Most attorneys will not apply for fees, and counsel for the WJRO will not apply for fees or costs.

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Scope of Release

The Settlement of this case (*In re Holocaust Victim Assets Litigation*, Master File No. CV-96-4849) concludes all legal actions and disputes against Swiss Entities relating to the Holocaust, World War II, Victims or Targets of Nazi Persecution, the Nazi Regime, treatment of refugees, or any related thing. The term "Swiss Entities" (or "Releasees") includes Credit Suisse and UBS AG (successor to Union Bank of Switzerland and Swiss Bank Corporation), and their former and current corporate parents, subsidiaries, affiliates, and branches; the Swiss National Bank; other Swiss Banks; the Swiss Bankers Association; the Swiss Confederation (including the Swiss government); all business concerns headquartered, organized or incorporated in Switzerland as of October 3, 1996; and certain other affiliates of Swiss concerns described in the Mailed Notice. Certain claims against various Swiss insurance companies listed in the Mailed Notice are not included in this Settlement.

* The second Settlement Class also includes claims against Swiss Entities relating to "Cloaked Assets," which are assets disguised by a Swiss Entity for the benefit of an Axis company or person associated with the Nazi Regime, between 1933 and 1946.

proportionality. Passing references to Edith Stein and Polish actions in Auschwitz, which merely provide a setting for the article, are twisted out of context.

Pace Mr. Perlmutter, there are no Jews trying to determine who should be a Catholic saint. But there is legitimate Jewish concern with the historical truth—namely, that Edith Stein did not die in Auschwitz because she was a Catholic believer but because the Nazis deemed her a Jew according to the Nuremberg race laws. My advice to Mr. Perlmutter is not to be more papist than the Pope—it is rarely convincing.

To cap this comedy of misunderstandings, Milton Himmelfarb correctly notices my inadvertent slip and then proceeds to make a much bigger error of his own. For I do not at all argue that Nazi anti-Semitism is “the same” as Christian anti-Semitism. I make the distinction clear, but I insist that the dividing line is not absolute. The sickness—namely Judeophobia—is common to both Christians and Nazis. But there is a very significant difference between “an uncomfortable [Christian] fever” with which Jews learned to live and the “lethal” [Nazi] variant that was an ideology of mass death.

Finally, it is a pleasure to turn to the two letters that make a genuine effort to understand my analysis of *We Remember* as a whole instead of mounting an apologetic assault or trying to score facile polemical points. While I am not sure I always follow Michael Novak’s logic, I am indeed grateful to him for his intellectual honesty and for keeping an open mind. As he so rightly

says, “truth is truth” and we are obligated to follow it wherever it may lead, however painful that may be.

But, like him, I believe that history has not yet said the last word on Pope Pius XII and that much research remains to be done by Catholic, Jewish, and other scholars before we can reach a more conclusive judgment. It was all the more poignant, therefore, to read James F. O’Callaghan’s letter, which goes to the heart of the “repentance” Pope John Paul II has so insistently called for. Mr. O’Callaghan hits the nail on the head when he reminds us that “you cannot repent what you deny.” Genuine contrition must avoid blurring the line between apologia and apology, or hedging the recognition of guilt with too many qualifications. This applies to Protestants and Jews as much as to Catholics, to the nations of East and West, and to all those individuals, groups, and organizations that failed to live up to their ideals in the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The Day-Care Abuse Trials

TO THE EDITOR:

Dorothy Rabinowitz of the *Wall Street Journal* has done a heroic job of exposing the mass hysteria behind the “ritual sex-abuse” trials of child-care workers in the 80’s, some of whose victims are still in prison. But she was not the first to do so, as Barbara Lerner claims [“Of Professors and Pedophiles,” April]. The first article on the subject that I know about—because I assigned and edited it—was Debbie

Nathan’s “The Making of a Modern Witch Trial,” a report on the case of two day-care teachers in El Paso, Texas, which appeared in the *Village Voice* in September 1987. Nathan went on to write a number of other articles on ritual-abuse trials, including a 1988 *Voice* article on the case of a New Jersey teacher, Kelly Michaels, which was later the subject of Rabinowitz’s first piece on this phenomenon. Nathan is co-author, with Michael Snedeker, of *Satan’s Silence* (Basic Books, 1995), an analysis of the cultural and political currents that produced these travesties of justice.

Also predating Rabinowitz’s work was Shirley Downing and Tom Charlier’s series of articles, “Justice Abused,” which appeared in the *Memphis Commercial-Appeal* in January 1988.

Until the ignominious collapse of the McMartin Preschool case in 1990, most journalists uncritically supported the ritual-abuse prosecutions or were cravenly silent. It is important to remember the exceptions.

ELLEN WILLIS

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New York City

Dynamists & Stasists

TO THE EDITOR:

In his review of Virginia Postrel’s *The Future and Its Enemies* [April], Daniel Casse correctly observes that the “dynamism” Postrel advocates is essentially libertarianism by a different name. But he implies, incorrectly, that dynamism requires that we countenance all change (“For Postrel,

change often appears to be an end in itself. She seems to care little about the actual content of American character, so long as it is ‘dynamic.’”). Yet at several points in the book, Postrel stresses that it is crucial that an open-ended system be subject to feedback, both positive and negative. This is the crux of the book—that progress should be fully open to criticism, but criticism as reflected in individual choice rather than being short-circuited by the state.

Self-restraint, moderation, and patriotism are indeed virtues, as Mr. Casse notes, but when imposed by government they can be unintentionally suffocating. “Collective” choice is a concept that Postrel rightly questions. Mr. Casse cites a number of issues—abortion, affirmative action, school prayer, etc.—where, he claims, the distinctions Postrel draws between dynamists and stasists do not apply. But in fact they do. Let me cite just two: the dynamist position on school prayer would most likely stem from educational vouchers, with parents being free to choose whether or not they prefer a school with a religious orientation. The stasist, on the other hand, wishes to make prayer mandatory in all schools. The dynamist position on affirmative action would be to allow companies freely to hire employees of any race. The stasist would require that all companies have a defined racial mix.

CHRISTOPHER SADLER
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TO THE EDITOR:

Virginia Postrel’s error, according to Daniel Casse, “like that of libertarianism

more generally, is to assume that the same principles of change and absolute openness must apply across every realm of life."

Let us be careful not to fault libertarianism incorrectly. Libertarianism insists upon the distinction between peaceful activities (ones that do not violate anyone's rights to life, liberty, and property) and aggression, the (unjust) initiation of force and fraud. Unless it can be shown that Internet pornography and drug use, for example, are rights-violating activities, there is no just reason to call for government intervention against those who participate in them. But on some issues, there is good reason to suggest that even libertarians can be enemies of the future.

One example Mr. Casse mentions is abortion. Virginia Postrel takes a pro-choice position on this issue. A strong minority of libertarians, however, holds that being pro-life is necessary to defend liberty. "Today, we are seeing a piecemeal destruction of individual freedom," wrote Congressman Ron Paul (R., Texas), the Libertarian party's candidate for President in 1988:

And in abortion, the statisticians have found a most effective

method of obliterating freedom: obliterating the individual. Abortion on demand is the ultimate state tyranny; the state simply declares that certain classes of human beings are not persons, and therefore not entitled to the protection of the law. The state protects the "right" of some people to kill others, just as the courts protected the "property rights" of slave masters in their slaves.

Congressman Paul adds: "The more one strives for the consistent application of an incorrect principle, the more horrendous the results. Thus, a wrong-headed libertarian is potentially very dangerous."

Mr. Casse also mentions assisted suicide. Many who favor it make the libertarian-sounding argument that one cannot violate one's own rights, even by killing oneself. If there is a right to suicide, such people argue, a person also has a right to have someone else assist in that action. But "even if one holds that, in principle, there is a right to suicide, in practice, it can be another matter entirely," points out John Walker, research director for Libertarians for Life. "In practice," he asks, "how do we distinguish whether a death has been an assisted

suicide or whether it has been, instead, killing someone without their assent?"

"The people most often offered as candidates for 'needing' assistance in suicide," Walker continues,

include those in severe pain, those with diminished mental capacity, and those needing long-term or expensive medical care. These people are less likely to be able to give genuine consent, and are all disproportionately subject to the control of others. Some proponents of assisted suicide are clearly willing to have decisions take place on the basis of what they think people "ought" to want.

And, as Walker reminds libertarians, "Government control over medicine is growing, not lessening. Picture yourself weak and helpless in the hospital with an admirer of Dr. Kevorkian looking at you saying, 'I'm from the government, and I'm here to assist you.'"

A Brave New World does not a libertarian future make.

DORIS GORDON
Libertarians for Life
Wheaton, Maryland

DANIEL CASSE writes:
Christopher Sadler plausibly argues that libertari-

ans rely on the primacy of "individual choice" when deciding how to respond to issues such as school prayer or affirmative action. His mistake is to assume that anyone else who reaches a similar conclusion about these issues does so for the same reason, and, therefore, must be lumped in with the group Virginia Postrel calls "dynamists." In fact, many Americans who agree with Mr. Sadler's prescriptions for school prayer or affirmative action do so for decidedly "nondynamist" reasons, including a sense of justice, religious conviction, or simply the preference for one set of results. As I argued in my review, that is why the grand coalition of dynamists that Postrel believes is so essential to the future usually falls apart in practice.

If there were any doubt on this point, one need only read Doris Gordon's letter about internal dissension in libertarian circles on abortion and assisted suicide. The very fact that self-identified libertarians appear to disagree on these contentious, high-profile issues confirms my thesis that the world of politics is far more complex than Virginia Postrel's rigid framework would have us believe.

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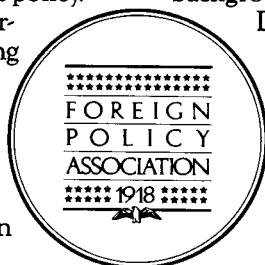
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Arming China Against Ourselves

Aaron L. Friedberg

A LITTLE less than four years ago, a high-ranking Chinese officer issued a thinly veiled threat to the United States. In a conversation with a recently retired American official, the chief of military intelligence for the People's Liberation Army declared that China would use any means necessary to prevent Taiwan from becoming an independent state. If the United States interfered, it would find itself in a direct confrontation, perhaps even a nuclear showdown. And this was a test Washington was destined to lose: when push came to shove, the Chinese officer coolly informed his interlocutor, the United States would hardly be willing to "sacrifice Los Angeles to protect Taiwan."

At the time it was made, this threat was barely credible. In the mid-1990's, aside from shorter-range weapons of the sort it had recently fired in a successful effort to intimidate Taiwan, Beijing probably had no more than twenty missiles capable of reaching the United States. All were single-warhead rockets of dubious reliability and considerable vulnerability. Based in fixed installations and powered by volatile liquid fuel, they resembled the sorts of weapons that the U.S. and Soviet Union had last deployed in the early 1960's.

But now fast-forward to the first decade of the

21st century. Over the next several years, China is expected to build a fleet of more than 500 theater-range rockets. Topped with highly accurate conventional warheads, these missiles may be able to strike not only at Taiwan but at targets throughout the Western Pacific, the home territory of most of America's regional allies, as well as at U.S. military bases in Japan, Okinawa, Guam, and South Korea. By that point, China may also have deployed a force of at least several dozen mobile, solid-fueled ICBM's, each ready to be launched at a moment's notice and each equipped with at least one and possibly several independently-targetable nuclear warheads capable of reaching virtually anywhere in the United States.

By 2005, in short, the military balance in East Asia is likely to be far less favorable to the United States than it was in 1995. While the larger geopolitical implications are not yet certain, one thing is already clear: the impending shift in power will be, at least in part, the consequence of American actions. As the recent Cox Committee report makes painfully apparent, the weapons China builds over the next few years will be better—more accurate, more reliable, and more destructive—because of technology obtained in various ways from the United States.

How did this happen? Although the release of the Cox report has focused national attention on nuclear espionage, the full story of American dereliction is more entangled than that—and, if anything, much more alarming.

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ANYONE INTERESTED in placing the revelations of the last few months in their proper perspective can profitably begin by reading James Mann's remarkable new book, *About Face: A History of America's Curious Relationship with China, From Nixon to Clinton*.^{*} Mann, a diplomatic correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, combines a journalist's eye for drama and the telling vignette with the thoroughness of a professional historian. He has interviewed virtually all the major participants in the making of America's China policy over the past 30 years, and, through judicious use of the Freedom of Information Act, has managed to unearth an array of previously classified government studies and memoranda. Although his book was completed before the most recent disclosures, it puts our present fiasco in historical context, enabling us to see both the continuities and the departures in American policy over the longer term.

The story as Mann tells it divides neatly into three decade-long intervals, starting in 1969, the year that Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon began their attempts to open a diplomatic dialogue with China. At the outset, the two men hoped that simply by reestablishing contact with the People's Republic, they would be able to exert considerable leverage over our then-principal adversary, the Soviet Union. Within a few years, however, the United States had moved from a policy of supposed "equidistance" between the two Communist giants to a tacit strategic alliance with China to oppose what the Chinese liked to call "Soviet hegemonism."

Thus it was that, in the mid-1970's, the United States began to take its first, cautious steps to enhance the capabilities of China's armed forces. It was Kissinger, not his Chinese counterparts, who seized the initiative. In addition to his larger strategic calculations, Kissinger was motivated by more immediate concerns. Although he and Nixon had promised they would move swiftly to formalize relations with China and to cut U.S. ties with Taiwan, American domestic politics made it hard for them to deliver on their pledge. So, according to Mann, they "began to search for other ways to keep China happy." Improved access to Western technology was, at first, a partial substitute for formal diplomatic recognition.

Although the United States was not yet prepared to sell military equipment directly to China, it was ready to look the other way while others did so. In the fall of 1975, the British broke a longstanding barrier by selling Rolls Royce jet-fighter engines to China without clearing them through normal export-control channels. A year later, in another first,

Kissinger arranged for the sale of two large American-made computers. These were classic examples of what would come to be referred to as "dual-use" items: intended to help process oil-prospecting data, the computers were also potentially suitable for military applications.

THE SOVIET invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 marked a new stage in the U.S.-China relationship. During his early years in the presidency, Jimmy Carter had been content to expand, if gingerly, on the policies of his predecessors. Relations with Beijing were finally normalized at the end of 1978, and in the meantime the Chinese had been allowed access to a slowly growing list of American dual-use technologies as well as to European-made weapons and other defense hardware whose purchase had been facilitated by Washington.

After Afghanistan, things changed. Carter announced that we ourselves would begin selling military equipment, although for the time being the list would be restricted to "nonlethal" items such as air-defense radars, electronic countermeasure devices, and communications gear—no tanks, helicopters, or artillery pieces. This was a characteristic Carter half-measure, impelled more by (muddled) moral considerations than by any hard-headed strategic calculation.

Then came Ronald Reagan, who, after some hesitation, took the process initiated by Carter to its logical conclusion by permitting the purchase of "lethal" as well as "nonlethal" merchandise. The reasoning seemed clear: as the United States was still engaged in an intense strategic competition with the Soviet Union, the enemy of our enemy was—at least for the moment—our friend. As Mann reports, this view came with qualifications: at least some Reagan officials, including Paul Wolfowitz (Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 1982 to 1986) and Richard Armitage (Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs between 1983 and 1989) continued to see China not only as a counterweight to the Soviet Union but as a potential threat in its own right. For them, the goal of U.S. arms-sales policy should be to help China defend its frontiers and coastal waters but not to enhance its capacity to project power outward.

Whatever the rationale, open and large-scale arms sales continued throughout the Reagan and into the Bush administrations—until the Tiananmen Square

^{*} Knopf, 352 pp., \$30.00.

massacre of June 1989. This event brought into being the new, more ambiguous, and more dangerous phase in which we find ourselves today.

In the aftermath of the killings in Beijing, President Bush suspended exports of all military equipment, lethal or otherwise. (This ban remains in effect today.) But Bush was also eager to patch things up with China. Sales of dual-use items were therefore allowed to continue, albeit under the watchful eye of American export-control officials. During the early 1990's, a steady if still relatively small stream of lasers, computers, test instruments, and other devices made its way to Chinese customers, of whom many turned out to be involved in the development of military systems.*

Why, with the USSR on the verge of collapse, did the United States continue to engage in even this limited form of military-technical cooperation with China? Bush and his advisers seem to have been guided by a combination of inertia and the hope that China would help them construct a "new world order." Over the next six years, Bill Clinton would embrace this same line of reasoning, embellishing upon it with typical gusto.

It is true that, during his successful presidential campaign in 1992, Clinton had attacked Bush for being soft on "the butchers of Tiananmen Square." Once elected, he also made some initial gestures toward a tougher trade policy, conditioning an extension of China's status as a most-favored nation (MFN) on improvements in human rights and freezing transfers of certain dual-use items as punishment for China's continued export of missiles to Pakistan.

But when these initiatives evoked howls of protest both from Beijing and from the captains of American industry, Clinton quickly and characteristically reversed course. Within a matter of months, the administration was granting waivers to its own sanctions and backing away from any linkage of MFN with human rights.

These early confrontations taught the Chinese an important lesson: as Mann puts it, "to an extent considerably greater than its predecessors [the Clinton administration] was subject to commercial pressure." Or, to put it more bluntly, the new President could be rolled.

OVER THE years to come, Beijing would not lose sight of this central fact, or neglect to act upon it—most recently, in its tantrum over admission to the World Trade Organization. By the mid-1990's, at any rate, China had the satisfaction of being seen by Washington no longer as an enemy of an enemy but as a genuine friend, a "strategic

partner." In order to secure the good will of this partner, the Clintonites considered it essential to grant it continued access to American technology as well as to American markets and capital.

Politically, this position had the considerable virtue of being virtually impossible to challenge. For if China seemed at times to be pocketing the benefits of "partnership" without delivering on its half of the bargain (as, for example, by restraining North Korea's ballistic-missile program), administration officials could always point out that things might well be worse—and besides, any move to tighten up might provoke China to act in ways that would do even greater harm to U.S. interests.

Implicit blackmail being a less than satisfactory basis for true friendship, the administration also sought to construct loftier justifications for its policy of intense "engagement." There was, first of all, the by-now familiar proposition that trade promotes economic development, which leads, inevitably, to political liberalization. (How long that process would take, and what sorts of unpleasantness might occur along the way, were questions left unexplored.) Accompanying this was the comforting notion that the world economy had anyway become truly "global," which meant that if the United States refused to sell strategically significant technologies, China would simply buy them from somebody else. Huge impersonal forces had thus effectively eliminated either the possibility of prudence or the need for responsibility.

It is not hard to see how such arguments must have appealed to Bill Clinton. But, from the start, another factor was at work as well. Liberalizing high-tech trade had long been a top priority of many American corporations, which stood ready to reward compliant politicians with generous campaign contributions. In 1992, Clinton had benefited significantly from the support of computer, electronics, and software-industry executives, and he was eager both to repay his debt and to position himself as their preferred candidate in 1996. From his earliest days in office, as *New York Times* reporters Jeff Gerth and Eric Schmitt have described, Clinton took a direct and personal interest in overhauling the nation's export-control system. "One reason I ran for President," he assured a major electronics-industry executive in the fall of 1993, "was to tailor export controls to the realization of a post-cold war world."

On this issue, at least, the President was as good

* Some of these sales are detailed in a report by the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, *U.S. Exports to China: 1988-1998: Fueling Proliferation* (April 1999).

as his word. Within months of his coming to office, the federal government had effectively deregulated the sale of whole categories of dual-use items, including many types of computers and most telecommunications equipment. Where controls did remain in place, they were often significantly relaxed. Licensing procedures were also overhauled in ways that made it much easier for American companies to win approval of proposed sales and much harder for the government to stop or even adequately to study them. As a result, to take one notable example, American manufacturers were soon able to export to China computers seven times more powerful than any previously sent. Whatever else these so-called "supercomputers" might be good for, they were ideally suited to performing the vast number of calculations necessary to simulate nuclear explosions or to crack encrypted messages.

Some (though presumably not all) of the unintended results to which the new leniency led have since come to light. The Cox Committee report provides new details on one such case. In the spring of 1994, over the initial objections of the Navy, Air Force, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Defense Intelligence Agency, the Commerce Department authorized the sale to China of super-high-precision machine tools of a sort previously denied. McDonnell Douglas had used these devices to manufacture parts for U.S. military aircraft and missiles, but the Chinese buyer promised they would be applied solely to the construction of commercial passenger planes. Some of the machine tools were later found to have been diverted to a facility involved in the production of military aircraft and anti-ship cruise missiles.

In 1995, Gerth and Schmitt have reported, with his reelection campaign approaching, the President intervened again to urge Secretary of Commerce Ronald Brown to do even more "to streamline and liberalize" the remaining system of controls. Sure enough, within months the administration was considering relaxing further the remaining restrictions on computer exports. Under the proposed new regulations, American companies could sell still more powerful computers to China, though exports of the very fastest machines were supposed to be restricted to "civilian" customers.

At the time, critics of this policy within the administration worried that there would be no way of telling where a particular computer wound up, or for what purpose it was being used. Controversy over the issue was finally resolved by the President himself—in favor of leniency—and Chinese

buyers promptly purchased a large number of very high-speed supercomputers. The Cox report concludes that, in fact, some of these were "obtained by PRC organizations involved in the research and development of: missiles, satellites, spacecraft, submarines, aircraft, military-systems components, command and control, communications, microwave and laser sensors"—and nuclear weapons.

In 1996 the President made a judgment about another controversial matter, too: he stripped the State Department of its authority to make decisions about the export of commercial communication satellites and transferred responsibility to the more business-friendly Commerce Department.

Since 1988, U.S. companies had periodically used relatively inexpensive Chinese rockets and launch facilities to boost their satellites into orbit. All such transactions were governed by a set of detailed regulations meant to limit the possible unauthorized transfer of information between U.S. technicians and their Chinese counterparts. American satellite-makers found the rules burdensome, in part because they made it difficult to teach the Chinese how to keep their rockets from exploding. With the Commerce Department in control, they hoped that the flow of information would not be as closely regulated.

Reportedly, the president of Hughes Electronics Corporation, a builder of satellites, played a major role in persuading the administration to change its licensing procedures; the president of Loral, another company with a direct stake in satellite exports to China, would eventually become the single largest contributor to the Clinton reelection campaign. According to the Cox report, at the same time that Loral and Hughes were lobbying for looser controls, they were already engaged in transferring sensitive technical information that may well have helped the Chinese to improve the reliability and accuracy of their ballistic missiles.

ALL OF which brings us at last to the matter of espionage. Since, despite the best efforts of the Clinton administration to relax export controls, the United States was not simply giving China everything it needed to modernize its armed forces, the Chinese also engaged in an active and apparently very successful effort to steal American secrets.

In what is perhaps its most stunning passage, the Cox Committee reveals the PRC's most significant theft: "classified information on all of the United States's most advanced thermonuclear warheads." These data have probably already been put to good

use. It appears likely that a thermonuclear device tested by China in the mid-1990's was based on an American design obtained in the late 1980's. This new, miniaturized weapon could be used on mobile intercontinental-range ballistic missiles of the kind now scheduled for deployment by the Chinese just after the turn of the century.

Whether this particular coup was more the result of Chinese skill than of American sloppiness remains to be determined. As has been widely reported, the man suspected of passing on the warhead design is a naturalized American citizen and a longtime government employee at Los Alamos with appropriate security clearances. Betrayals from within are difficult to detect and impossible entirely to prevent. Still, it is also the case that, as early as 1988, the General Accounting Office (GAO) had begun to warn of lax security precautions at the nation's three key nuclear-weapons laboratories. With the cold war winding down, and the labs eager to find new, nondefense roles, more and more foreign scientists were being invited to participate in exchanges and joint research projects. By the mid-1990's the volume of foreign visitors was expanding at a rapid pace, with many coming from so-called "sensitive countries" (China, India, and the former Soviet states).

And here is another fact: the efforts of the weapons labs to branch out and open up had support from the highest levels. According to news reports, in the mid-1990's, Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary went so far as to prohibit, as "discriminatory," badges clearly showing an employee's level of clearance. More seriously, in 1994-95, at the same time it was loosening export controls, the Clinton administration initiated a "U.S.-China Lab-to-Lab Technical Exchange Program," designed, in the words of one participant, to promote arms control and engage the Chinese in constructive dialogue by "sharing selected information on nuclear materials and facilities."

Nearly a decade after its first report, the GAO warned again in 1997 that most of the visitors to the Los Alamos and Sandia laboratories were not subject to any kind of background check, with the result that some people "with connections to foreign intelligence organizations were gaining access to the laboratories without DOE [Department of Energy] and/or laboratory officials' advance knowledge of the visitors connections." Once inside, these guests were able to engage in wide-ranging discussions with American scientists and were sometimes permitted to walk the "unsanitized" halls unescorted and after hours. In one in-

stance, GAO inspectors reported finding "six boxes of papers marked 'sensitive material' in red letters on the outside . . . left in an open hallway accessible to foreign visitors."

ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS claim that the original theft of warhead data did not happen on their watch. This may be true. But another, massive breach appears to have occurred very much on their watch, in 1994 or 1995. In any case, what makes the issue more complex, and potentially more damaging, is the question of what happened when evidence of the penetrations finally began to emerge. Former DOE intelligence chief Notra Trulock has told Congress that he first warned White House officials in April 1996, and again in July 1997; but it was not until February 1998 that President Clinton signed an order mandating tighter security at the laboratories. Another eight months would pass before the order was implemented. The accused spy was not dismissed from his job until this past March, when details of the Cox Committee's findings on nuclear espionage first leaked into print.

This lackadaisical response itself demands an explanation. It seems clear that, at the outset, White House officials were being told something they desperately did not want to hear. In the spring of 1996, the administration was working hard to ease tensions with China over Taiwan and to coax Beijing into signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). (The Chinese finally did so, but only after they had completed a series of tests that convinced them their new warheads would actually work.) The presidential race was also heating up, and Clinton's top advisers were no doubt eager to avoid disclosures that might raise questions about the wisdom of "engagement."

Later, with the election safely won, the White House was busy preparing for a U.S.-China summit and defending itself against charges that it had benefited from illegal Chinese campaign contributions. Revelations of nuclear spying at this point would have been doubly embarrassing. In response to Trulock's second warning, a National Security Council staffer ordered the CIA to prepare what has since been described as a "quick study" of the recent great leap forward in Chinese nuclear-warhead design. The CIA's report pointed to other possible sources of information from which Chinese weapons designers may have benefited. The situation was complicated, the evidence inconclusive. Allegations of espionage were once again pushed to the back burner.

IT MAY be a measure of how secure we feel right now, or perhaps of how jaded we have become about such matters, that even the most recent and quite devastating news about nuclear espionage has been greeted in some quarters with a shrug of indifference. After all, it is said, everyone spies; and is it not fruitless, in today's free-trading, Internet-linked global economy, to try to control the flow of technology and knowledge? Besides, if profit has replaced empire as the preeminent goal of nations, what difference do changes in the balance of military power really make?

It may be comforting to imagine that there are no more secrets, and reassuring to assert that "if we don't sell it, someone else will." But such beliefs happen to be mistaken. Reliable data on how to design and build a miniaturized nuclear warhead are not available on any website. According to the Cox Committee, access to such information, obtained via clandestine means, permitted the Chinese to move "in a handful of years, from 1950's-era strategic nuclear capabilities to the more modern thermonuclear weapons designs." Without it, they would have had either to continue as a holdout on the CTBT (thereby incurring the suspicion if not the opprobrium of most of the developed world) or have forgone forever the possibility of modernizing their ICBM force. A well-placed spy permitted Beijing to have the best of both worlds: a badge of good international citizenship and the capacity greatly to expand the size, reach, and lethality of its strategic arsenal.

Nor are the secrets of the federal weapons labs the only ones worth keeping. Leading American aerospace and telecommunications companies have accumulated a vast storehouse of knowledge about how to build and integrate complex systems. Such knowledge is essential to the manufacture and operation both of cutting-edge commercial products and next-generation weapons systems; it is typically the product of decades of experience, and much of it can best be conveyed not on paper but through intensive, face-to-face contact among highly trained scientists and engineers. A few American-led seminars on nose-cone "fairings," "kick motors," and "separation mechanisms" may not have involved the transfer of classified documents, but they could well have shaved years off the time it will take China to deploy a world-class ballistic-missile force.

The notion that even the most advanced high-technology products are now available from an infinite array of sources also deserves closer examination. It turns out, for example, that American

companies and their subsidiaries still dominate the world market for supercomputers. If the U.S. government truly wanted to slow the pace at which countries like China, India, Russia, and Pakistan acquire the latest versions of these machines, it could do so; and, with the assistance of only a handful of other governments (in particular the Japanese, German, and British), it could do so with even greater effectiveness.

In short, although the United States cannot freeze the distribution of knowledge and power, it can do a great deal more than it has done in recent years to slow the diffusion of select, critical technologies. And this is a vitally important goal: we would have much less reason to fear the Chinese if they were to become a functioning democracy before they acquired a truly modern military. In international politics, as in life, timing can be everything.

THIS IS not to say that China has already acquired a truly modern military. Despite the fact that Beijing may now be in a position to advance considerably beyond where it was when the Chinese officer issued his bluff in 1995, it is still in many respects a second-rate power. Chinese aircraft, the best of which are 1980's-vintage models purchased from the former Soviet Union, lag far behind their American counterparts. China's tanks are antiquated next to ours, and its navy has yet to develop even small aircraft carriers, let alone the oceangoing behemoths with which the United States projects its power around the globe.

Comparisons like these have caused the American intelligence community generally to take a rather relaxed view of China's military potential. But they miss the point. Chinese strategists are not interested simply in plodding along the path to military power already taken by the United States and the Soviet Union. To judge from what they write and say to one another, they are eager to exploit the latest advances in technology in order to develop entirely new weapons and concepts of operations. A "revolution in military affairs" of the sort that many American experts now believe to be under way worldwide could render entire categories of traditional weapons systems obsolete and, in the process, permit an agile, ambitious power rapidly to gain ground on a fat, complacent hegemon.*

* For example, the same huge aircraft carriers in which the United States has invested so much over the years, and on which its strategy so heavily depends, may soon be irretrievably vulnerable to swarms of relatively inexpensive cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and intelligent torpedoes.

The Chinese, in other words, may be looking for ways not simply to catch up with where we are now but to exceed where we are likely to be in twenty years. In the meantime, they seem to be searching for shortcuts: forms of military capability that will permit them quickly to counter our current strengths and to exert a greater political influence throughout East Asia. For these purposes, a large arsenal of shorter-range, conventional ballistic missiles, backed by a modest force of intercontinental-range nuclear weapons, is quite appropriate.

Thus armed, China will be able to threaten to bombard Taiwan, closing its ports and airfields, damaging its defenses, and disrupting its economy, without actually destroying the island. If other regional powers should seek to come to Taiwan's assistance, or allow the United States to do so from their soil, they will run the risk of similar treatment. The handful of bases on which the U.S. relies to project its power into the Pacific will be vulnerable to precise attack. And if the United States threatens to respond by striking back at China, it will confront the likelihood of nuclear retaliation.

In the face of these looming realities, it is no wonder that the United States, Japan, and Taiwan should all have expressed interest lately in building some form of defense against ballistic missiles. Nor is it a surprise that China, for its part, has embarked on an intensive campaign of pressure to delay or derail the development of any such system.

FOR AS long as the Soviet Union was around, it could be argued that arming China made a certain sense. If, at times, American officials pursued this policy with more vigor and less caution than was warranted, their mistakes were mistakes of degree, committed in the service of a larger strategic goal. Since 1989, however, or since 1991 at the very latest, our errors have been more fundamental, and much more dangerous.

The massacre in Tiananmen Square ought to have served as a reminder that, as long as China is

ruled by Communist autocrats, it can never truly be a friend or a trusted partner of the United States. To the contrary, with the Soviet Union gone from the scene, China is obviously the state most likely to mount a serious, longterm challenge to American power.

Whether our current leadership realizes it or not, the United States and China are already engaged in a struggle for mastery in Asia. As the *Economist* recently predicted, the rhetoric of "strategic partnership" is about to give way to more open talk of "strategic competition." True, this competition will be different in many ways from the one in which we were involved for over 40 years with the Soviet Union. The United States and China are likely to remain far more intertwined economically and in other ways than the superpowers ever were during the cold war. At least for the moment, moreover, China's ambitions are more regional than global, having less to do with the fervent wish to promulgate an ideology than with more traditional great-power desires for local preponderance and worldwide prestige. Like the United States at the time of the Monroe Doctrine, China may want nothing more than to be acknowledged as the dominant power in what it regards as its own backyard. But the pursuit of even this comparatively modest goal will put the two countries definitively at odds.

A Sino-American competition need not result in open confrontation, or in war—though it could. But one thing is certain: if the relationship is to be peaceful, what will be required on our part is a complete turnabout from the combined pattern of exaggerated but empty expressions of amity and utter recklessness about preserving our present advantages. When it comes to putting our own house in order, there is no longer the slightest doubt that the course pursued in recent years has amounted to a major strategic blunder. All that remains to be determined is the extent to which it may also have been a crime.

“A Man’s Own Household His Enemies”

Gertrude Himmelfarb

A PASSAGE in the Talmud reads:

Rabbi Eliezer the Great said: . . . As the footsteps of the messiah approach, shamelessness will spread. . . . Schoolrooms will be used for lechery, . . . scholarship will degenerate, those who shun sin will be despised, and truth will be banished. Boys will insult the elderly and the elderly will defer to children—“son spurning father, daughter rising up against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law—a man’s own household his enemies” [Micah 7:6]. The face of that generation will be like a dog’s face, men not being abashed before their fathers.

As the millennium approaches, we may well heed that ancient prediction. Certainly there is much in our schoolrooms and scholarship, our sense of sin and truth, to give us pause. But it is the current crop of memoirs that is most ominous, most suggestive of the word “shamelessness.” There was a time when biographers had to overcome the resistance of grieving widows and children reluctant to part with documents that might expose the frailties of their dearly departed ones.

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Today it is those widows and children who are taking it upon themselves to do the exposing. And not only widows and orphans but husbands and wives, sons and daughters, while their spouses and parents are still alive.

There was also a time when the “confessional mode,” as we now dignify this genre, was focused upon one’s self, a confession (*à la* Augustine) of one’s own faults and sins. Today it is more often a “confession” of the faults and sins of others—of parents, lovers, friends, associates, or, if need be, of society at large. We speak of these memoirs as narcissistic, even solipsistic. And so they are, in a sense. But it is a narcissism and solipsism calculated to absolve the self of responsibility for one’s own self, to make some other self, or selves, complicitous in one’s failings.

Again, there was a time when this familial cannibalism was confined to public figures—to movie stars, most notably. The archetype is *Mommy Dearest* by Joan Crawford’s daughter, but others have been similarly savaged: Bing Crosby by his son, Woody Allen by his former wife, most recently Michael Landon by his son. Politicians too have been vulnerable; Ronald Reagan has the dubious distinction of being the subject of critical books by two of his children (both of whom have since relented). One might argue that these victims are fair game because they themselves have exposed their personal lives to public scrutiny, actors by means of publicity agents and politicians by trotting out their

families for their own purposes—although even so, one might well question the propriety of a child, rather than a journalist or political opponent, doing the exposing.

Now it is the turn of writers to be eviscerated by their nearest and not-so-dearest. Some writers, to be sure, have brought it upon themselves by acting as if they were public figures, appearing on television and radio talk-shows and happily responding to questions about their personal lives. But others make an earnest effort to preserve the difference between their public and private personas, between what they choose to put in their books and how they choose to conduct their personal lives. It is this distinction that is more and more often violated, and not only by presumptuous reviewers and interviewers but by their own spouses and children.

RECENTLY WE have been confronted with two egregious examples of this invasion of privacy—the objects in both cases, as if to compound the offense, being eminent writers who, more than most, have cherished their privacy. With great literary skill and an even greater show of sensitivity, the English literary critic John Bayley has written a memoir of his wife, the novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch. Published while she was still alive (she has since died), *Elegy for Iris** reveals, in excruciating detail, the horrors of Alzheimer's disease that afflicted her in the last years of her life. One does not question Bayley's love and devotion, not even when he rebukes himself for sometimes being insufficiently loving and devoted. One cannot, however, help noticing that these confessions of lapses have the effect of enhancing his own image of an almost superhuman patience, while also providing the occasion for revelations of some of the most gruesome details of his wife's condition.

It is a curious "elegy" that we are presented with—an elegy for Iris that has a way of turning into an homage to John. Thus, one reviewer has paid tribute to Bayley's "heroism," his "heroic love," a heroism all the more heroic because its "dominant tones are humility, modesty, patience, and humor." It seems churlish to say of a book that is beautifully written, richly allusive, learned, elegant, Proustian in tone and mode, that precisely these qualities vitiate its ostensible purpose, distracting attention from the subject and focusing it upon the very gifted author. Even the rhapsodic memories of the young Iris, warm, humorous, intelligent, much loved by a host of friends and admirers, cannot compete with the wrenching, unforgettable details of the aged woman regressing to

near-infancy, being bathed, dressed, cajoled by her loving husband.

This is all the more distressing to the reader because we know that it would have so distressed Murdoch herself. Bayley himself tells us of her insistent, almost obsessive need for privacy, so that even in their marriage they were emotionally apart as much as together, an apartness she treasured. For a long time, he was ignorant not only of love affairs in her past but of the many warm friendships she retained. He discovered this early in their marriage. "I knew their names; I imagined them; I never met them." And, he adds wistfully, "there seemed to be so many of them," friends to whom she was "deeply and privately attached," and whom she chose not to share with him. She even nurtured that privacy in her work. "She went on then [before her illness] secretly, quietly doing her work, never wishing to talk about it, never needing to compare or discuss or contrast, never reading reviews or wanting to hear about them, never needing the continual reassurance from friends or public or the media which most writers require in order to go on being sure that they are writers." One interviewer complained that during the course of his conversation with Murdoch, "she had found out all about him and he had learned nothing about her." Bayley himself, except in one instance, did not read her books before publication.

The privacy that Murdoch cherished at the best of times (the words "private," "reserve," "solitude," "separate," "apart" recur throughout the book) has been violated by showing her at the worst of times, suffering all the indignities that come with that degrading disease. The image we now have of her will inevitably overshadow the figure of the person we once knew and admired. No one will ever be able to remember her or write about her as she would have liked, and deserved, to be remembered or written about—not as the pathetic soul who resisted having her socks removed when she was coaxed into the water or who spent the mornings watching *Teletubbies* on television, but as a mature, dignified, civilized, and very gifted human being, the author of numerous novels (26, by Bayley's count) and half a dozen philosophical works, the recipient of many honorary degrees and distinctions, a Dame of the British Empire, and, not least, a person with a great talent for friendship as well as love and marriage. It is monstrous to think that the last five years of her life should so overwhelm the other 75. And it is heart-breaking to hear Bayley baby-talk her as she watch-

* St. Martin's, 1998.

es children's shows on television, and chilling to hear him say, "I tell her she is nearly four years old now—isn't that wonderful?"

THE LATEST example of this genre, an essay called "My Father and the Weak-Eyed Devils," makes no pretense at being an elegy, as is clear from its title (taken from Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*). Nor does it have the redeeming literary and intellectual value of Bayley's. For Americans, though, it may be more disturbing, because it deals with one of the most important intellectuals of our time, a man who for quite other reasons is being neglected and disparaged and who now will be even more unjustly so.

James Trilling's memoir of his father Lionel Trilling appears in the Spring 1999 issue of the *American Scholar*. Unlike Bayley, James Trilling waited until well after his subject's death to write his memoir, perhaps not so much because of filial piety as because he did not have the means at hand for the task—and not only the medical (or pseudo-medical) diagnosis that he brings to bear on his father, but the information (or misinformation) that he derived from his mother. Lionel Trilling died in 1975, at the age of seventy; Diana Trilling started to write her own memoir of their life together, *The Beginning of the Journey*, ten years later and published it in 1993; she died in 1996. Her son, now fifty, says that he has derived much of his evidence about his father from tapes made by his mother in preparation for her book—indeed, much of it echoes her book.

At a time when psychoanalysis was all the rage, the Trillings, father, mother, and son, all underwent extensive therapy. James Trilling's "discovery" is that their problems were not neurotic but neurological, and could have been solved by the proper medication. But it is not only the solution to their problems that is problematic, and not even the diagnosis, but the nature of the problems themselves.

The revelations in Diana Trilling's book about her agoraphobia, panic attacks, and the like came as no surprise to her friends; they had long been aware of them and had had to take them into account in their relations with her. But Lionel Trilling was far more discreet—"private," as both wife and son repeatedly testify; presumably only his analyst knew why he sought treatment. Yet the son feels confident that he understands his father's difficulties because, he is now convinced, they are also his own. What his father suffered from is the disease he himself has: attention deficit disorder, or ADD, as it is commonly known. "I have it, my fa-

ther almost certainly had it, and in all likelihood his father had it too." In the course of his essay, that "almost certainly" becomes a certainty, and it comes to explain his father's public as well as his personal life, and, most notably, the quality of his writing and thinking.

"My father rarely spoke to me of himself," James Trilling tells us early in his memoir. But his mother spoke a good deal, of herself and her husband. And it is from her that the son learned of his father's incompetence at swimming, tennis, dancing, and driving a car, his ineffectiveness in dealing with practical matters (money, his publisher, his students), his periodic depression, rages, and writer's block—all of which James Trilling interprets as classical symptoms of ADD. Those symptoms, he tells us, are:

hyperactivity, but also lethargy and daydreaming; procrastination, but also rushing into situations without thinking about rules and consequences; unwanted shifts of attention, as when a conversation overheard across the room suddenly drowns out everything else; unprovoked or disproportionate outbursts of temper; inability to plan ahead, stick to a task, or keep track of time; insensitivity to other people's unspoken needs; high-risk and thrill-seeking behavior; and obsessive cravings that are no sooner satisfied than they give way to others just as intense.

To those who knew Lionel Trilling, nothing could resemble the man less than this litany of incapacities. James Trilling anticipates the objection that an ADD sufferer cannot have a distinguished career. "Not every alcoholic," he reminds us, "staggers through the streets blind drunk." If his father could succeed so well, he suggests, it is because "life as a university teacher in the mid-20th century provided the very conditions he needed." But the academic life as Lionel Trilling experienced it, and triumphed in it, was not a sinecure. At Columbia University, he taught serious courses in a highly structured undergraduate curriculum to superior and demanding students, never failed to meet his classes or other commitments, and cultivated and befriended his best students. He also delivered lectures outside the university to supplement his income, served as adviser to two book clubs and contributed regularly to their journals, lived a full and engaged social life—and with it all managed to produce learned, subtly reasoned, and masterfully composed books and essays (twelve volumes in the collected edition) that made him one of the most distinguished literary and social critics of his time—some would say, *the* most distinguished. His

wife reminds us that, apart from their few times abroad, he never took a vacation from work, not even on holiday.

The ADD diagnosis is so palpably unwarranted that it hardly needs extensive criticism. Paul R. McHugh, the head of the psychiatry department at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and a member of the board of the *American Scholar*, who had not been consulted about the essay, has resigned from the board in protest against the publication of so unsound, mean-spirited, and self-serving an exercise. One need hardly point out the weakness of a diagnosis that depends upon such not uncommon failings, among city-born and -bred intellectuals, as a less than perfect proficiency at swimming, tennis, driving, or dancing. (In fact, Lionel Trilling was an especially powerful swimmer, and as adept a dancer as most in his circle.) Nor need one take at face value the "rages" reported by his wife, which the son interprets as yet another symptom of the irrationality associated with ADD. (These episodes of verbal abuse, "at most five or six a year," were directed entirely at her.) Nor need one belabor the primitive, reductive nature of a diagnosis that interprets so sophisticated and subtle a mode of thought as Lionel Trilling's, so attuned to complexity, ambiguity, and tragedy, as nothing more than a physiological infirmity that could have been cured—that should have been cured—by the proper medication.

Apart from all its other faults, what is striking about this memoir is the way its author implicitly places himself on a par with his subject, indeed, puts himself at the center of the stage. In the case of John Bayley, there is some excuse for this. Even if one knew nothing else about him, *Elegy* would reveal him to be a superb writer and a worthy biographer of his wife, for whose work he professes the greatest admiration. James Trilling's claim to our attention, in this essay at any rate, is the medical disorder that he thinks he shares with his father and that permits him to belittle him intellectually, as well as personally. In retrospect, he resents the fact that his father, witnessing the little boy's tantrums while trying to retain his own composure, refused to acknowledge that "he and I were in the same boat." To the reader, it may seem more remarkable that at no point does the adult son acknowledge that, in terms of accomplishments, they are hardly "in the same boat." ADD serves to demean not only his father's personal life but his public life as well, and not only his career and reputation, but the mind, character, and *oeuvre* that sustained that career and earned that reputation. Echoing his mother, the son complains that his fa-

ther acquiesced too readily in his "public self" and "public virtue," the high regard in which he was held—and which, the son (again, like the mother) suggests he did not entirely deserve.

In another respect, however, the two memoirs are all too much alike. Lionel Trilling, like Iris Murdoch, was acutely jealous of his privacy. And both memoirists know this perfectly well; indeed, make a great point of it. James Trilling's essay opens: "My father, Lionel Trilling, never told the story of his life." Two sentences later we read: "My father rarely spoke to me of himself." The paragraph concludes: "I cannot picture him setting down his hopes and fears, even the most cerebral ones, for strangers to read." Later in the essay we are reminded that he was "private to the point of secretiveness." Here too the son takes his cue from his mother, who begins her book by telling us that at the time of his death Lionel Trilling had been about to begin an "autobiographical memoir"—not an "autobiography," he insisted, because he meant to "bypass his private life, or at least not dwell on it." Later, in discussing his tendency to depression, she observes that "he was at pains not to disclose it even to his closest friends"—whereupon she proceeds to disclose it to the world.

MEMOIRS OF this kind are not by journalists who, in the name of "the public's right to know," feel free to violate all confidences and claims to privacy. Nor are they by biographers who aspire to write objective, comprehensive works and say they cannot afford to be inhibited by their subjects' desires or dispositions. They are, rather, by members of a family, who willfully (they are under no compulsion to do so) choose to divulge intimate, often disagreeable facts (or supposed facts) about their closest relatives. In some cases, the motivation is obvious: an act of revenge on an abusive or neglectful parent; or an expression of resentment toward a celebrated spouse; or an assertion on the author's part of identity or equality or even superiority; or a desire to enjoy the publicity that comes from intimate, sensational, presumably authentic revelations; or, more simply still, a moral obtuseness that is not aware of any impropriety because it does not recognize the distinction between the personal and the public, still less the unique nature of familial relations, affections, and obligations.

One final example of this failure of sensibility. A few years ago, the American biographer Phyllis Rose was honeymooning with her husband, Laurent de Brunhoff (the son and successor of the creator of the famous Babar books), when they decid-

ed to visit his brother, a well-known French concert pianist who had abandoned his career to become a monk. At his remote hermitage, the monk broke his normal regimen of "silence and secrecy" to explain why he had chosen to enter the monastic order, then to leave the monastery for a more secluded hermitage, and to cease listening to music lest it interfere with his religious devotions. Rose's account of that memorable day, "The Music of Silence," appeared in the October 1997 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. The concluding paragraph reads:

Alain disapproves completely of my having written this and asked me not to publish it. I've changed his name, the name of his monastery and its location, and the name and location of his hermitage to protect his privacy, but I will never get him to see my having written what he told me as anything but a violation of a confidence. By profession and national temperament, I believe in making things known; by profession and national temperament, he believes in keeping them quiet.

A skeptical reader might wonder whether "profession and national temperament"—rather than, say, self-promotion and narcissism—best describes Rose's behavior. Or whether she really believed she could "protect his privacy" by changing his name and the name and location of his places of refuge; surely it is not difficult to identify the famous pianist son of the even more famous de Brunhoff family. In the spirit of revelation, one might even be emboldened to wonder what her new husband thought of her journalistic coup at the expense of his brother.

We know that at least some of her readers did not think well of it. The four letters printed in a subsequent issue of the *Atlantic* were uniformly hostile. Rose's reply is even more revealing than her original article. "How can I be truthful," she asks, "about my own life without infringing on somebody else's?" And then, in conclusion:

The piece demanded to be written because of my mental involvement with my brother-in-law. Both as a member of my family and as someone who had great worldly success and turned his back on it, he figures large in my imagination, putting into perspective the way I live. His withdrawal is an envied possibility, a moral pole. In speaking truthfully about this for myself, I expect in some way to be speaking for others. A writer has no other justification.

That ubiquitous personal pronoun! It is not the seclusive hermit that is the real subject of her piece; it is "my own life," which is to say, Phyllis Rose's—just as Bayley's memoir is (far more subtly) about his life, or James Trilling's (less subtly) about his. We have long been familiar with this "personalist" tendency in academia, on the part not only of feminists proclaiming "the personal is political" but of professors in all disciplines who deliberately intrude themselves into the subjects of their work. It is part of the postmodernist tendency that denigrates objectivity and rationality, elevates the reader or critic above the novelist or poet, and tries to undermine all "hegemonic," "repressive," "authoritarian" modes of thought and behavior. "The I's Have It," is the title of an article in *Lingua Franca* documenting this tendency. It is in this spirit that Phyllis Rose herself once pronounced, "George Eliot, *c'est moi*," thereby creating an Eliot in the likeness of a properly liberated late-20th-century American feminist.

But George Eliot (or Virginia Woolf, or Charles Dickens, or any other subject of Rose's biographical ventures) is one thing; her hermit brother-in-law is another. And so is a wife suffering from Alzheimer's disease, or a father from a presumptive case of ADD, or all the other victims of this new form of spousal or parental or filial abuse. We have not yet had a parallel case of child abuse—a parent exposing the faults of a child. But perhaps that too will come.

Can the Bible Be Trusted?

Hillel Halkin

TWO NEW books lie on my desk. Both are about the Bible and the ancient Near East. Each is written by a scholar whose views are considered extreme. One argues that almost everything in the Bible that is commonly thought to be history is myth. The other argues that almost everything in the Bible that is commonly thought to be myth is history. Logically speaking, both cannot be right, although it is possible for both to be wrong. Does it matter?

THOMAS THOMPSON, a professor of Bible at the University of Copenhagen and the author of *The Mythic Past: Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel*,* is one of a group of Bible scholars sometimes referred to as “biblical revisionists” or “biblical minimalists.” His position, when first staked out in the early 1970’s, appeared so radical that he was, so he writes in his introduction to *The Mythic Past*, “shut out of university teaching” and “forced to make a living as a handyman and house painter.” Even today it places him at the far end of a spectrum of thought that has since become respectable, even vogueish.

What do the minimalists believe? Although they have their disputes among themselves, all agree that there is no historical basis to any of the narratives in the Pentateuch or in the books of Joshua,

Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, and the first half of 1 Kings—that is, to the Bible’s entire account of Israelite origins from the age of the patriarchs through the “united monarchy” of David and Solomon, traditionally dated to the 10th century B.C.E. “Biblical history,” if there is such a thing at all, begins for them with the separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the 9th and 8th centuries, of the existence of which there is independent confirmation in Assyrian records. The text of the Bible, including its legal codes, prophetic books, and psalms, is a literary creation whose oldest parts are no older than the late-6th-century Babylonian exile.

Not all of these opinions are exclusive to the minimalists. More moderate Bible scholars nowadays share some of them, too. Their quarrel with men like Thompson, or his Copenhagen colleague Niels Peter Lemche, stems from their belief that, first, starting at least with David and Solomon, the Bible is talking about real historical figures; and second, parts of its text predate the Babylonian exile and are possibly contemporaneous with the events they describe. In 1997, the biblical archeologist William Dever remarked to the two Copenhageners in a round-table discussion sponsored by the *Biblical Archaeology Review*:

If you guys think I or the Israeli archeologists are looking for the Israelite conquest [of Canaan] archeologically, you’re wrong. We’ve given

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* Basic Books, 412 pp., \$30.00.

that up. We've given up the patriarchs. That's a dead issue. But the rise of the Israelite state [of David and Solomon] is not. . . . I agree that there is no connected history in [the Book of] Joshua, but maybe we should look at the Book of Judges. That fits a lot better with the facts on the ground as we now know them.

By "the facts . . . as we now know them," Dever was referring to a revolution that has taken place in biblical archeology in recent decades, one partly triggered by the Israeli occupation of the Jordanian West Bank in 1967. Until then, the dominant biblical archeologist of his times was William Foxwell Albright, an American who began digging in Palestine in the 1920's. Although no fundamentalist, Albright was a Christian in his fashion, and, happily for his religious beliefs, his and others' excavations in Palestine and the Near East, together with the wealth of written material unearthed by them from the ancient civilizations of Sumer, Babylonia, Assyria, and Egypt, appeared to corroborate the biblical record.

To be sure, apart from a single obscure reference to inhabitants of Canaan called "Israel" in the "Marniptah Stela" (from the late 13th-century B.C.E.), none of this material alluded to specific biblical events or individuals earlier than the 9th century. (A second exception, an Aramaic inscription apparently bearing the words *bet-david*, "the house of David," turned up at a dig in Tel Dan in northern Israel in 1993.) Nowhere was there so much as a hint of an Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph; of an enslavement in Egypt or liberation from it; of an Israelite conquest of Canaan. Yet, broadly speaking, the more knowledge accumulated about ancient Near Eastern geography, history, culture, and religion, the more consistent with the Bible's descriptions it seemed to be. What especially impressed Albright and other archeologists were excavations interpreted as showing that numerous Canaanite towns and villages had been destroyed and abandoned, and then resettled, during the 13th and 12th centuries B.C.E. Since biblical chronology pointed to this period as the time of Joshua's conquest of Canaan, what better proof of the conquest could there be? And if the Bible was, as Albright put it, "remarkably reliable" about Joshua, why not about Moses and Abraham, too?

THIS CONFIDENCE in the biblical text was first shaken in the 1950's when the British archeologist Kathleen Kenyon began reexcavating the already dug site of Jericho—which, she now demon-

strated, had been abandoned well before the 13th century and was a ghost town at the time that Joshua and his Israelites were said to have brought down its walls. It was only in the 1970's, however, as a new generation of Israeli archeologists using more sophisticated methods gained access to the Jordan Valley and the hills of Judea and Samaria—the areas of central Palestine in which Israelite settlement supposedly first occurred—that the whole structure of Albright's "biblical maximalism" collapsed.

Many other Canaanite sites, it now turned out, had also been abandoned earlier; others had been resettled long after; many showed no signs of a violent end, their depopulation being apparently due to causes other than warfare. Albright and his school, a growing consensus now held, had misread the evidence. And if the Bible was remarkably *unreliable* about Joshua and his conquest, why trust it about what had happened before or after?

A bit simplistically stated, this is the background for Thompson's new book, a sweeping survey synthesizing current biblical scholarship from a minimalist perspective. The Israelites, *The Mythic Past* proposes, were not invaders of Canaan but Canaanites themselves who gradually abandoned their towns and villages in the Late Bronze and Iron Transition age (roughly 1600 to 1200 B.C.E.) because of a prolonged period of drought that forced them to give up agriculture; shifted to a seminomadic life based on herding; and slowly resettled their old homes and founded new ones when an improved climate encouraged them to "resedentarize" in the Iron age. Even as late as the 10th century B.C.E., their society was too primitive and decentralized to support the imperial kingdom ascribed to David and Solomon, who must be considered purely legendary—as must Solomon's temple and the early importance of Jerusalem, a city lacking all geopolitical significance prior to the 8th century. As for the Marniptah and Tel Dan stelae, the "Israel" of the first has nothing to do with the people of the Bible, while the *bet-david* of the second should probably be read *bet-dod*, "the house of the beloved," and be considered a place name.

And the composition of the Bible itself? Thompson now dates this in its entirety to the Hellenistic age, the period between Alexander the Great's conquest of Palestine in 333 B.C.E. and the beginnings of Roman rule in 63 B.C.E.. Much of it, he believes, took place coevally with the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls and early pseudepigrapha like the Book of Jubilees, and the entire project reflects the concern of a freshly emergent Hellenistic Judaism to celebrate "not an ancient nation" but "a new

Israel," a surviving remnant of a largely fictional "old Israel" that the Bible's authors invented in order to appoint themselves its religious heirs.

"The point to grasp," Thompson sums up, "is that the Bible's stories . . . aren't about history at all, and that to treat them as if they were history is to misunderstand them."

LIKE THOMPSON, David Rohl has been overlooked by the academic world; the difference is that he still is. Currently president of the lowly Sussex Egyptology Society, he and his work are not even listed in the lengthy bibliographies appended by biblical scholars to their books. Nor is his new, slickly illustrated *Legend: The Genesis of Civilization*,* which claims among other things to have discovered the historical sites of the garden of Eden and the beaching of Noah's ark, likely to improve his academic reputation.

Despite a penchant for overstatement and an adventure-story style, however, Rohl is no mere sensationalist. *Legend*, with its profusion of detail, charts, tables, and archeological photographs, is as mentally demanding a book as Thompson's *The Mythic Past*. Nor is it primarily about the Bible, despite its intricately constructed claim that the early chapters of Genesis and their fabled heroes, genealogies, and eponyms that even an Albright never took seriously as history can be correlated with real people, places, and events in ancient Mesopotamia and Assyria. Its main thesis concerns proposed connections between these two lands and Egypt, whose Pharaonic civilization, Rohl believes, began with a daring Mesopotamian conquest of the Nile valley in the neighborhood of 3000 B.C.E.

More germane to the issue of the Bible's historicity is a previous book by Rohl, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (1996). In it, he recalibrates the accepted chronology of ancient Egyptian history and contends, by means of a complex chain of historical argument, that the so-called "third intermediate period," a Pharaonic era traditionally placed between 1070 and 715 B.C.E., began much later. Since the years eliminated by him create a time vacuum, earlier Egyptian history must move up to fill it. Thus, the reign of the nineteenth dynasty's Rameses II, identified by some historians with the Pharaoh of the Exodus, is transferred by Rohl from the middle 13th to the late 10th century B.C.E.; that of Amenemhat III of the twelfth dynasty is transferred from the late 19th and early 18th centuries to the middle 17th; and so on.

What does this have to do with the historical accuracy of the Bible? Everything, says Rohl. His cal-

culations lead him to identify Amenemhat with the Pharaoh of Joseph, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus not with Rameses but with the mid-15th-century B.C.E. Dudimose. This enables him to relocate the story of the Exodus itself from *circa* 1250 B.C.E., where it has commonly been put, to *circa* 1450—at which point all falls into place. Joshua now arrives at Jericho just in time for its walls to topple; other Canaanite cities, too, are destroyed when they should be; and David and Solomon are pushed back to the Late Bronze age, from which there is archeological evidence of impressive royal construction not only in Jerusalem but in Palestinian sites like Megiddo, Hazor, and Gezer.

Before he is through with this historical *tour de force*, Rohl has found the palace and tomb of the patriarch Joseph in the eastern Nile delta; discovered evidence of the epidemic that killed Egypt's firstborn in the last of the ten plagues; located references to Saul and David in the el-Amarna letters, an 11th-century B.C.E. cuneiform correspondence between Canaanite rulers and the Pharaonic court; and proposed still other parallels between persons and events in the Bible and ancient Egyptian sources. "Without initially starting out to discover the historical Bible," he writes, "I have come to the conclusion that much of the Old Testament contains real history."

EVEN IF Rohl's new Egyptian chronology should prove correct (and this is not an issue that a lay reader can judge), his theories are strongly flavored by what Thompson calls the "circular reasoning" of biblical maximalism. A good example is the treatment in *Pharaohs and Kings* of an el-Amarna letter written by a Canaanite chieftain named Labayu in Palestine's central hills.

Since *labayu* means "lion" in ancient Canaanite, a language similar or identical to ancient Hebrew, and since Psalm 57, ascribed by the Bible to David while hiding "when he fled from Saul," speaks of being surrounded by "lions" (*leva'im*), the letter writer or "Lion Man," Rohl concludes, must have been Saul himself. And yet, while this conjecture is intriguing if one assumes that Saul and David were real people; that they lived at the time of the el-Amarna letters; and that David wrote the psalm in question, it becomes little more than unruly speculation when deprived of such assumptions. The whole problem, as Thompson puts it, is that "We are looking for the origins of Israel as we know it from the Bible, yet we are unable to confirm any

* Century (London).

biblical narrative as historical until we first have a separate, independent history with which we might compare the Bible's account."

But there is circularity in the minimalists' approach, too. They, too, beg the question by positing that, in the absence of a "separate, independent history," the Bible is *not* historical. What makes this premise any more logical than its opposite? It is one thing, after all, to claim that archeology disproves the Bible's version of the conquest of Canaan.* It is quite another thing to deny all existence to an Israelite leader named Joshua simply because there is no extrabiblical confirmation of it. Why should the burden of proof rest with the Bible?

Because, say the biblical minimalists, the Bible, when read carefully, is an obviously inconsistent, unrealistic, and tendentious document. Considered as history, it does not deserve our trust.

That may be so. But to put the matter this way is essentially to return the argument over the Bible's historicity to its starting point when the so-called higher criticism first arose in the 19th century: that is, from the arena of archeology to the biblical text itself. What, then, does this text tell us about its *own* history?

THE ANSWER, of course, is many things—nearly all of which have been commented on *ad infinitum* since modern biblical scholarship began. That the books of the Bible have different strands and different authors, for example. And that different parts of them appear to have been redacted in different places and at different times. And that not all of those who wrote or edited them shared the same point of view. And that all had *some* point of view that they sought to impose on their material. And that some of this material is clearly fanciful or imaginary.

All this is perfectly consistent with biblical minimalism. Yet two aspects of the biblical text, I think, are not. Both are literary—and what they reveal, curiously, is that scholars like Thompson and Lemche, who make much of the literary nature of the Bible, have, when it comes to literature, a tin ear.

The first aspect concerns periodization. Let us imagine, by way of analogy, that, due to the loss of all pre-19th-century records, the controversy over "who wrote Shakespeare" has, by the 28th century, grown so confused that a group of scholars proposes that Shakespeare's plays were not written in Elizabethan times at all but were composed in the late Victorian age in an archaic Elizabethan English deliberately seeded with anachronisms. Would such a claim be credible? I think not. What serious liter-

ary critic would believe for a moment that even the most brilliantly versatile talent could produce *Twelfth Night* or *Midsummer Night's Dream* (let alone *Hamlet* or *King Lear*) in the era of *Major Barbara* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*?

And yet it is the close equivalent of this that Thompson asks us to believe when he proposes that the biblical Book of Psalms is contemporary with the "Thanksgiving Psalms" of the Dead Sea Scrolls, or that the passage in Genesis narrating that

And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of,

"shares a common intellectual world" with the passage from Jubilees that relates:

And it came to pass . . . and [the evil angel] Prince Mastema came and he said before God, Behold, Abraham loves Isaac his son. . . . Tell him to offer him as a burnt offering upon the altar. And you will see whether he will do this thing. . . . And the Lord was aware that Abraham was faithful in all of his afflictions because he tested him with his land and with famine. And he tested him with the wealth of kings. And he tested him with his wife and with circumcision. And he tested him with Ishmael and with Hagar his maidservant. And in everything in which he tested him, he was found faithful. And his soul was not impatient.

And he was not slow to act because he was faithful and a lover of the Lord. And the Lord said to him, Abraham, Abraham. . . . Take your beloved son, whom you love, Isaac, and go into the high land and offer him up on one of the mountains that I will make known to you.

This comparison does not tell us when Genesis was written. But it does tell us that the second of these passages is not only a commentary on the first but reflects a later historical period with a different theology, mentality, and prose style. *None* of the dozens of Jewish literary works definitely pro-

* Actually, even if Rohl is entirely wrong, the evidence on this point is not as clear-cut as it has been made to seem. Some Canaanite settlements were destroyed in the 13th and 12th centuries; their not having been immediately reinhabited might be due to their sackers' being desert nomads who did not immediately choose to settle down; and not all military conquest leaves archeological remains anyway. What archeological proof do we have that William the Conqueror conquered England?

duced, like Jubilees, in the Hellenistic age has the outlook, tone, or manner found in most of the books of the Bible. And perhaps not unrelatedly, none has the grandeur, either.

But there is an even more important point to make—which is that, while the minimalists have been much influenced by recent critical analyses of the Bible showing it to be a work of highly sophisticated literary sensibility, they consistently play down the fact (which was a central concern of higher criticism) that this sensibility repeatedly behaves in strikingly unliterary ways.

Let us look at one example by returning to the story of David's pursuit by Saul. In chapter 24 of 1 Samuel, a book widely regarded as one of the Bible's literary gems, we are told how David has taken refuge in a cave that Saul enters to rest in without being aware that his quarry is inside. Stealing quietly up to the sleeping king from behind, David cuts off "the skirt of his robe," waits until Saul has left the cave and is at a safe distance, steps into the open, and calls out:

My lord, the king. . . . Behold, this day, thine eyes have seen that the Lord hath delivered thee today into mine hand in the cave; and some bade me kill thee; but mine eye spared thee . . . yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand. . . . And Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said, . . . the Lord reward thee good for what thou hast done unto me this day.

Now turn to chapter 26. This time, Saul is chasing David in the "wilderness of Ziph," where, pitching camp at night, he falls asleep in the midst of his sleeping troops. Stealing quietly up to him, David takes the king's spear and water bag, retreats to a nearby hill, and calls out to Saul's general, Abner:

Art thou not a valiant man? . . . Wherefore then hast thou not guarded the lord thy king? . . . And now see where the king's spear is, and the bag of water that was at his pillow. . . . And Saul knew David's voice and said, Is this thy voice, my son David? . . . I have sinned; return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm.

It does not take the tools of higher criticism to make us realize that these are two different versions of the same incident. Why, then, did the author of Samuel give us both of them, thus clumsily repeating himself in a way that no competent writer of fiction would dream of doing, when the two stories could easily have been combined and reduced to a single, more effective one?

The answer would seem as obvious as the question. It is that, while he wished to use his great narrative talents to their best advantage, he did not believe that he was writing fiction. He believed that he was writing fact handed down to him—and whether he thought that both variants had happened, or that he simply lacked the mandate to choose between them, he felt obliged to pass them on as he had received them.

Indeed, over and over again in the Bible we find the literary skills of its authors or redactors frustrated by such concerns. At times this takes the form of senseless redundancy; at times of internal contradictions that could have been ironed out by simple editing; at times of curiously irrelevant details; at times of obvious errata allowed to remain in the text; at times of tedious genealogies or legal codes that interrupt the narrative flow. And most of all, it takes the form of puzzling silence; for, considered as fiction, the truly remarkable thing about the Bible, often referred to as its "stark" or "minimal" prose, is that it constantly spurns opportunities for dramatic description and development that any skilled writer of fiction would seize eagerly.

Paradoxically, then, the very features of the Bible that have been invoked to call its historical reliability into question—its lack of unity, inner discrepancies, fragmentary nature, and arbitrary selection of material—most demonstrate its authors' conviction that they had no right to expand or diminish the information they were entrusted with. They could shape it, craft it, even comment on it—up to a point. But that point was always before them.

ALTHOUGH THE Bible may not be telling the truth, then, neither is it making much up. It is using literary techniques to transmit a tradition—or, rather, a large number of traditions.

This is hardly a revolutionary proposition. It is what nearly all biblical scholarship prior to the minimalists has maintained. Nor does even Thompson deny the presence of traditional material in the biblical text. Neither he nor his fellow minimalists, however, quite face up to the implications of this, or of the fact that an oral tradition, unlike a text, is inherently undatable.

Let us reflect on this for a moment. Suppose I discover a manuscript written in Middle English and describing William the Conqueror's use of artillery to defeat the Saxons at the battle of Hastings. Inasmuch as this battle took place in 1066 C.E., some three centuries before artillery was introduced into Europe, and Middle English

ceased to be spoken in the last quarter of the 15th century, this text can be roughly dated to between 1350 and 1475.

But now suppose that I also come across a little old English lady who tells me that her grandfather, born in 1852, was told by his great-grandfather, born in 1764, that, besides using artillery at Hastings, William the Conqueror wore pink stockings on that day. What can I say about this? Well, one thing I *cannot* say is that the belief that William the Conqueror wore pink stockings dates to between the mid-14th and late-18th centuries. For, on the one hand, the old lady may be imagining or misremembering; while, on the other hand, the stockings could be a genuine detail passed down from generation to generation since 1066. The matter of the artillery is irrelevant to these stockings, since they could represent a tradition that is far older. Moreover, both artillery and stockings may be neither totally imaginary nor entirely true, but rather garblings of the truth. Perhaps the original story, born at Hastings but changed by centuries of retelling, was that William used archers and wore yellow gloves.

The same holds true of the Bible. Despite decades of scholarly efforts, there is no way that internal analysis—examining the Bible's language, for example, or its cultural situation and background—can tell us when a biblical story originated or what its primal content may have been. Much has been made of such facts as that Genesis 24, which speaks of Isaac's riding a camel to his uncle Laban's home in Haran, is inauthentic, because Isaac would have lived in the 18th century B.C.E. and camels were domesticated later. But this is trivial. If Isaac, having ridden a donkey to Haran, told the story of his journey to his son Jacob, who told it to his twelve sons, who told it to their sons who told it to their sons until it reached the author of the book of Genesis, who wrote it down in the language of his day, camels might obviously have replaced donkeys at some point. So?

The fact is that we know a great deal about the transmission of oral traditions among peoples all over the globe—and what we know tells us, above all, two things: that such traditions can have extremely long histories, and that they constantly mutate in the course of them. Apart from such obvious fairy tales as Jonah's being swallowed by a big fish, there is relatively little in the Bible that cannot conceivably be a distant echo of something that once happened. Unfortunately, distinguishing an echo from an echo of an echo is for all practical purposes impossible.

DOES IT matter? Does it make any difference whether Abraham and Isaac existed or not?

To traditional Jews, Christians, and Muslims, obviously it does. But traditional believers are little influenced by historians. They have their convictions and do not let the disagreements between the Rohls and the Thompsons get in the way of them.

The same applies to present-day Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. Certainly it is no accident that, whereas a biblical maximalist like Albright was strongly supportive of Israel, the biblical minimalists tend to be far from that. If the Jewish people's claim to a 4,000-year-old relationship with Palestine is largely imaginary, and the first real Jews were Hellenized Babylonian-Canaanite *mischlings* who projected a self-serving national legend onto the past, is not the better claim that of the "real" Canaanites—the Palestinians? But ultimately, few people are going to choose sides in the Middle East because of this. National myths and passions run deeper than the excavations of archeologists.

And ordinary readers of the Bible, those who turn to it for their own pleasure or edification? For them, one might think, the current debate over its historicity matters least of all.

Thompson, indeed, thinks that the very attempt to construe the Bible as historical is naively to miss its whole point:

The most disorienting difficulty with such readings of the Bible is that they attempt to transpose a perspective of reality underlying biblical traditions into peculiarly modern terms. They permit reflection on our reality, but not reflection on what was real for the writers of the Bible. . . . "Reality" for the Bible lies quite far from both this world and its events. "History," like all of the events of human affairs, is, for the ancient traditionist, illusory. It is like the whole of this material, accidental, and refracted world in which we live. . . . True reality is unknowable, transcending experience.

Yet even if we construe the Bible as "mere" literature, is this an accurate literary judgment? It may be the way the Bible was read by Platonically-influenced Hellenistic intellectuals, or by medieval mystics, and it is obviously one way of reading it in a late-20th-century culture heavily affected by Buddhism and Eastern religion. But is this the bib-

* Thompson, it must be said, although his ambivalent attitude toward biblical Judaism carries a strong whiff of secularized Christian supersessionism, never pushes such reasoning to its limit. Anyone curious to see it at its politicized worst is invited to read a book like Keith W. Whitelam's *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (Routledge, 1997).

lical text as a discriminating literary taste experiences it? Its characters “illusory” actors in an “accidental and refracted” world? Saul and David? Abraham and Isaac? Would the mind still go numb each time it read of Abraham’s terrifying pilgrimage to Mount Moriah if we—if Abraham—had the comfort of knowing (as the prolix author of the Book of Jubilees thought *he* knew) that it was all an illusion? Is it because we are given to understand that Saul’s great love and great hatred for David are the insubstantial froth of an untrue reality that we weep with him?

I should think the opposite. The Bible, if read as literature, is unique in its ability to evoke in us the illusion that it is not an illusion. This is part of what accounts for its enormous hold upon men’s minds.

Who does not remember how he read when he was young? Greedily, gullibly, with that eager “suspension of disbelief,” as Keats called it, that, plunging into the midst of a story, forgot that it was in the midst of what was only a story? All fiction was history then. One may smile at childish innocence, but whoever has read great works of literature in this way, or even lesser works, knows that no book will ever again possess him in the same manner.

We mature. Our sophistication and discrimination develop—and with them the realization that all literature is artifice, and that the more gripping a story is, the more cunningly it is contrived. Eventually, if we become “good” enough readers, we actively look for the artifice, ferret it out, take pleasure in dragging it from its hiding place. But even if this does not happen, like the mother who whispers to her frightened child in the movies, we tell ourselves as Anna throws herself in front of the oncoming train or Jim leaps from the deck of the *Patna*: “Don’t worry. It isn’t real.”

Now—speaking from my own experience—long after we learn to react this way to Tolstoy or Conrad, we go on reading the Bible like children. It does not matter how many times I climb Mount Moriah with Abraham or look down at the

sleeping Saul. Each time, I am convinced it really happened.

Conceivably this has to do with the religious education I received as a child. No one drilled it into me at the age of eight or nine that *Anna Karenina* and *Lord Jim* were true stories. But equally, it has to do with the biblical text. For *its* artifice is hidden with a cunning that surpasses cunning, with such a violation of all rules of artifice as to give every appearance of being artifice’s absence.

Surely this is the reason that contemporary literary criticism came to the Bible so late—in the same 1950’s and 60’s in which the seeds of biblical minimalism were first sown: not because literary criticism feared to tread on holy ground, but because it falsely thought that a ground so full of weeds was lightly cultivated. And surely this is one reason why millions of readers throughout the ages, although perfectly capable of recognizing a work of fiction when they saw one, have believed the Bible to be true.

This is not to say that the Bible, or any part of the Bible, *is* true. It is merely to say that it is precisely one’s sense of literature that tells one that it is not precisely literature.

BUT DOES it matter? Especially, does it matter if one considers—as Thomas Thompson does—imaginative literature to be a high spiritual calling? *Anna Karenina* and *Lord Jim* are true, too, even if they happened only in the imagination. Why not be content with the same claim for the Bible?

The question is reasonable. I can think of two answers.

The first is that no one likes to be fooled. If the Bible belongs to the same truth-category as *Anna Karenina*, then I am fooled by it each time I read it. It is like watching a card trick repeatedly performed before one’s eyes without understanding how it is done. This is exasperating.

The second answer . . . but no: this would only be repeating the first in fancier language. One does not wish to be fooled. The Bible is not a book for children.

What Happened to Ralph Ellison

Norman Podhoretz

WHAT WINSTON CHURCHILL said of the Battle of Britain—"Never . . . was so much owed by so many to so few"—might with appropriate adaptations easily be applied to the American novelist Ralph Ellison. For surely no author ever owed so much to a single book: so much acclaim, so much honor, so many awards.

The novel in question, of course, is *Invisible Man*, which came out in 1952 when Ellison was already thirty-eight years old. Except for a few excerpts that had appeared while the book was still a work-in-progress, he had previously published only a number of reviews and a few stories of no particular distinction. But this first novel by an obscure Negro writer (to use the term in common currency in those far-off days) was immediately hailed on all sides as a classic, an imperishable masterpiece, perhaps the greatest American novel of the century. Accordingly, Ellison was elevated overnight into the upper reaches of our culture, and for the remaining 42 years of his life—he died in 1994 at the age of eighty—was treated reverently on the strength of this one book.

Well, not entirely, and not quite by everyone. Even upon its original publication, at least one other Negro novelist, John Oliver Killens, denounced *Invisible Man*: "The Negro people need Ralph Elli-

son's *Invisible Man* like we need a hole in the head or a stab in the back. . . . It is a vicious distortion of Negro life." Then for a time, especially in the 60's, black radicals of one stripe or another either ignored or attacked him as, if not exactly an Uncle Tom, then at least an unreliable ally in the struggle they were conducting against white society. Thus, to the poet and playwright Amiri Baraka (who had changed his name from LeRoi Jones upon becoming a fierce black nationalist), Ellison's sin was to elevate aesthetic over political considerations; to other black cultural separatists, it was his dismissal of the need for, or even the possibility of, a special "black aesthetic" and his belief in the universal "laws of literary form" to which all writers—and by extension artists working in other genres—of whatever racial or ethnic group were bound.

In its own right, as well as in its relation to him as a novelist, this aspect of Ellison's career has enormous interest and significance. It also lies at the root of the curious—and to him, if not necessarily to the rest of us, tragic—paradox of his life. But before getting into all that, I want to concentrate for the time being on the strictly literary part of his reputation.

On that side of Ellison's street, it was usually sunny, and hardly any rain ever fell on his parade. Much more typical than the attacks of Killens and Baraka (though echoes of them can sometimes still be heard) was the response of Ellison's fellow novelist, Saul Bellow: "What a great thing it is when a

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brilliant individual victory occurs, like Ellison's, proving that a truly heroic quality can exist among our contemporaries." It was mainly praise of this high order, and even higher, that came his way, and the few times he was criticized—by me, among others—it was for certain ideas expressed in his essays,¹ not for any faults or deficiencies that might have been unearthed in *Invisible Man* on a second or third reading, let alone a first.

THE LITERARY climate has changed very radically since 1952, to the point where many people have come to suspect the operation of a double standard whenever a black author wins the National Book Award or the Pulitzer or some other literary prize. It therefore seems necessary to state bluntly that the admiration Ellison evoked with *Invisible Man* emitted not the slightest whiff of critical affirmative action, and would not have done so even if such a concept had existed then (which mercifully it did not).

This is not to imply that Ellison's race went unnoticed. How could it? The word "novel" means new, and there was a time when the novelist saw it as his job either to bring the news of a world previously unexplored or to find a new way of performing that task on ground that may already have been broken and tilled and ploughed by others before him. In both of these senses—the substantive as well as the technical—Ellison was unmistakably and unabashedly, and proudly, a *Negro* novelist. As he himself defiantly declared: "Who wills to be a Negro? *I* do!"

Moreover, the "invisibility" he was making visible referred not only to the identity of his nameless hero. Even more broadly and crucially, it consisted of his effort to show that Negroes were very far from being an undifferentiated mass of suffering victims with no autonomous existence of their own—that they were not, in other words, a people wholly created and determined by forces controlled by the white world. This was how they had been, and still were (and to this day still are), most often portrayed by their own spokesmen, literary as well as political, black as well as white. But as Ellison never grew weary of saying in his essays and interviews, and as *Invisible Man* was written to "prove" in the way that only art can do, Negroes (even under slavery, let alone lesser forms of oppression) were fully human.

Human: that was the almost embarrassingly naked word he reverted to time and again in this connection. Being human, Negroes had always retained a degree of inner or imaginative freedom

that was "limited only by their individual aspiration, insight, energy, and will." And as such, they had also created a dense and distinctive culture.

In speaking of the culture of the American Negro, Ellison did so first in the anthropological sense:

Being a Negro American . . . has to do with a special perspective on the national ideals and the national conduct, and with a tragicomic attitude toward the universe. It has to do with special emotions evoked by the details of cities and countrysides, with forms of labor and with forms of pleasure; with sex and with love, with food and with drink, with machines and with animals, with garments and dreams and idioms of speech; with manners and customs, with religion and art, with lifestyles and hoping, and with that special sense of predicament and fate which gives direction and resonance to the Freedom Movement.

Clearly with Henry James's famous observation that it was a "complex fate" to be an American echoing in his head, Ellison went on to apply a version of the same concept to being an American Negro:

It imposes the uneasy burden and occasional joy of a complex double vision, a fluid, ambivalent response to men and events which represents, at its finest, a profoundly civilized adjustment to the cost of being human in this modern world.

But when Ellison discussed culture, he naturally also had in mind the arts—especially the blues, jazz, and (on its own less self-conscious level) folklore—that had developed to give the deepest expression to the American Negro's special modes of thinking and speaking and being. Such expression was what he had aspired to achieve in *Invisible Man*, and it remained his ambition throughout his whole life.

However, distinctive as the Negro American culture may have been, Ellison—blasting an unbridgeable gulf between himself and the black nationalists whose rhetoric his own could sometimes misleadingly resemble when the celebratory spirit was upon him—also never tired of repeating that this culture was simultaneously American to the core:

It is not skin color which makes a Negro American but cultural heritage as shaped by

¹ One collection, *Shadow and Act* (of which I wrote what I now regard as a wrongheaded negative review), was issued in 1964, and a second, *Going to the Territory*, came out in 1986. The contents of both of these volumes, plus some additional pieces, have been brought together posthumously by his literary executor, John F. Callahan, in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (Modern Library, 1995).

the American experience, the social and political predicament; a sharing of that "concord of sensibilities" which the group expresses through historical circumstances and through which it has come to constitute a subdivision of the larger American culture.

To Ellison this was a self-evident truth, although it too was "invisible" to most white people, and many blacks as well.

But most "invisible" of all was the correlatively pervasive interpenetration of the Negro culture and "the larger American culture," as well as the degree to which they drew from the same sources and had influenced and shaped each other. This is why he loved juxtaposing Louis Armstrong with the St. Louis born-and-bred T.S. Eliot, both of them children of the Mississippi River. Going even further, he always claimed that while he found Eliot's poem "The Waste Land" hard to understand when he first came upon it (in, as he often made a point of stressing polemically against those liberals who imagined that no such thing was possible, the library of Tuskegee, the black college he attended in the South), he could still detect in its obscure verses a resemblance to the offbeat jazzy rhythms that marked Armstrong's music.

One of the many times Ellison gave passionate expression to this idea of interpenetration was in a piece he did in 1970 entitled "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks" (the name that had by now supplanted "Negro," though Ellison himself never quite gave up on the older usage). Here he began by exploring the various schemes that had cropped up throughout American history for "getting shut" of the blacks. "Despite its absurdity," this "fantasy," he said, was "born not merely of racism but of petulance, of exasperation, of moral fatigue" on the part both of whites (including at one time even Abraham Lincoln, whom Ellison, unlike future revisionists, never ceased revering) and blacks alike.

But then, having underlined how relentlessly black culture had flowed into the American "cultural mainstream" ("Negro Americans are in fact one of its major tributaries"), he proceeded to challenge the newly influential idea (which had first been propounded most authoritatively a few years earlier by Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan) that the "melting pot" had not actually melted:

The problem here is that few Americans know who and what they really are. This is why few [white ethnic] groups . . . have been able to resist the movies, television, baseball, jazz, foot-

ball, drum-majoretting, rock, comic strips, radio commercials, soap operas, book clubs, slang, or any of a thousand other expressions and carriers of our popular culture.

From here Ellison leaped headlong to a much bolder assertion:

On this level the melting pot did indeed melt, creating such deceptive metamorphoses and blending of identities, values, and lifestyles that *most American whites are culturally part Negro American without even realizing it* [emphasis added].

One might even say without too much exaggeration that Ellison had written *Invisible Man* precisely to give novelistic life and flesh to this previously most "invisible" of all the truths he was bent on bringing to light ("Who knows," runs the book's last sentence, "but that on the lower frequencies I speak for you?").

But there was another side to the same coin that has to be displayed if the picture is to be complete—and all the more so at a moment when thinking on these matters, while bearing a superficial similarity to Ellison's, is at the furthest remove from his. If most American whites were, in Ellison's unshakable view, "part Negro American without even realizing it," most Negroes were conversely more American than they or their white countrymen generally understood. There is a saying in Hebrew: "As his name is, so is he," and Ralph Waldo Ellison was a very good example of this peculiar phenomenon. That he had been named after one of the quintessentially American writers and sages was something to which he and others often alluded as an amusing and even slightly embarrassing fact. But my own guess is that, deep down, he took it with great seriousness as a mark not only of his Americanness but of his literary destiny and his human fate.

ELLISON HAD originally set out to pursue a career in music, and though he then had and would maintain a lifelong love affair with, and the profoundest admiration for, the music of the black world—most notably the blues and jazz—his ambition was (characteristically) to become a composer of classical symphonies. Then, when already into his twenties, he met Richard Wright, who with the publication of *Native Son* (1940) was soon to emerge as the leading black novelist of the generation before Ellison's and who encouraged him to try his hand at writing. That did it. The young man's growing suspicion that he was not talented enough to realize his musical ambitions gave way to a more promising and

positive intuition: that what he was truly cut out for was a literary career—though in talking about Ellison, a better term would be “vocation.”

Yet it is of the utmost importance to emphasize again that Ellison’s ambition was to become an *American* writer. As what used to be labeled a “pluralist,” he believed in the existence of a common culture, one which the various ethnic and racial groups making up a heterogeneous society like ours steadily enriched by their indigenous contributions. This common culture was a precious heritage that could be claimed by any American of whatever group or color, and to it every American of whatever group or color also owed a debt and an allegiance. Which is to say that Ellison had nothing in common with today’s “multiculturalists,” who regard the common culture, to the extent that they recognize its existence at all, as nothing more than the heritage of a single group (the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants) and in whose eyes it deserves no special “privilege” with respect to the cultures of other groups. If anything, many multiculturalists even regard it as inferior.

For Ellison, this balkanizing tendency was an ironic reappearance in sheep’s clothing of the racial segregation under which he himself had grown up, and even may have been worse. Neither as a Negro kid in Oklahoma nor as a college student in Alabama was he prevented from reading books that opened his eyes and his mind and his imagination to a wider world of possibility; on the contrary, he was urged on, not discouraged, by teachers and other adults to do so. Later, even as a literary novice, he never felt himself to be “limited” in any respect by his race or defined by it as a writer. Hence it was not to other black novelists—not even his first sponsor Richard Wright—that he looked for models to be emulated. Still less did he think that it was their books he should study in trying to learn the new craft—“a very stern discipline,” he called it—that he was so fiercely determined to master.

One knows all this from the snippets of autobiography that frequently turn up in Ellison’s essays and interviews, and from the resentment always aroused in him by any suggestion that he had been exclusively or even largely influenced by other black writers. For instance, he excoriated his old friend and “sparring partner,” the critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, for assuming that the use of folklore in *Invisible Man* was a product of Ellison’s race:

I use folklore in my work not because I am a Negro, but because writers like Eliot and Joyce

made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance. My cultural background, like that of most Americans, is dual (my middle name, sadly enough, is Waldo). . . . My point is that the Negro American writer is also an heir of the human experience which is literature, and this might well be more important to him than his living folk tradition.

On numerous other occasions, he also went out of his way to deny that this or that detail of *Invisible Man* had been inspired by Wright or some other black predecessor. A much more powerful literary influence on him when starting out as a writer, he often insisted, had been exerted by a French novelist, André Malraux (and—further to underscore his constant emphasis on the admixture of cultures—he would add that it had been the Negro poet Langston Hughes who had given him two of Malraux’s novels to read).

In addition, it had been through three 19th-century novels, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*, and Feodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, that the artistic power of fiction had first made an impact on him as an undergraduate at Tuskegee. The American writers he most often cited in his pieces about literature were also all white: Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway. And then—above all, as it would turn out—there was William Faulkner, a Southerner who, though still to some extent infected by racism, had in Ellison’s judgment produced more truthful portraits of Negroes than any black or white-liberal Northern novelists had ever succeeded in doing.

YET EVEN if Ellison had not told us all this himself, one would have deduced it from his conception of the dual nature of identity in America—his own and that of all others who had arrived on these shores more recently than the *Mayflower*. And it would also have become clear to any perceptive reader of *Invisible Man*.

I am not a good enough scholar of black writing in America to assert with full confidence that *Invisible Man* was the first work of fiction by a Negro about the life of his people to free itself from the disabilities of what another Negro writer, about ten years younger than Ellison, James Baldwin, in an essay of the late 40’s about Richard Wright that brought him a premonitory taste of fame, had dubbed the “protest novel.” But if not necessarily the first, *Invisible Man* must surely have been the most successful. Baldwin had criticized Wright’s

most famous book, *Native Son*, and the tradition out of which it came, for representing its hero, Bigger Thomas, as so purely a creature of white oppression that he is not even responsible for the rape and murder he commits. Like all "protest" literature, *Native Son* thereby for all practical purposes dehumanized the black man, which as James Baldwin then saw it (he would later change his mind, to the great detriment of his own novels) was too high a price to pay, both in life and in literature, in order to do what this literature primarily aimed at—to make whites feel guilty.

As we can tell from his own written comments about Wright, and from many other indications, including *Invisible Man* itself, Ellison agreed with Baldwin's early view of the matter. Admittedly, he sometimes claimed that he did not "recognize [any] dichotomy between art and protest," citing Goya, Dickens, and Twain, and insisting that the problem for Negro writers lay not in the act of protest but in their "lack of craftsmanship and their provincialism." Still, it was in order to move beyond and transcend the limitations of the protest novel as handled by Negro writers before him that he employed the techniques he had learned from careful study of the great masters of the novel. And that this was exactly what he himself hoped to do he made no bones about admitting in 1981 in an introduction to a new edition of *Invisible Man*. There he confessed to the difficulty he had had in "trying to avoid writing what might turn out to be nothing more than another novel of racial protest instead of the dramatic study in comparative humanity which I felt any worthwhile novel should be."

Not that this was a matter of technique alone. For implicit in the novelistic craft itself at the highest reaches to which Ellison aspired was the ambition to represent the realities being portrayed in as full and rounded a form as possible. Which meant, as the great Victorian critic Matthew Arnold had put it in describing literary criticism at its best, striving "to see the object as in itself it really is." And this meant, in turn, eschewing special pleading, apologetics, and any offstage or, for that matter, onstage obeisance to the extraliterary imperatives of ideological militancy. In Ellison's formulation: "The greatest difficulty for a Negro writer was the problem of revealing what he really felt, rather than serving up what Negroes were supposed to feel, and were encouraged to feel."

To be sure, Arnold also spoke of literature as a "criticism of life." But (rather like the kind of protest Ellison defended) this was a criticism arrived at through the special objectivity or disinter-

estedness which was given only (borrowing a phrase from a poem by W.B. Yeats) to "the cold eye" of the true artist.

On my first reading of *Invisible Man* when it appeared in 1952, I thought that Ellison had pulled off this supremely difficult task. Here was a novel that presented us, in an intensely charged prose that managed (as Gustav Mahler had done in music, and as Saul Bellow would soon go on to do in *The Adventures of Augie March*) to synthesize elements of high style and low vernacular, with a wonderful—and often wonderfully comic—panorama of Negro life in all its American varieties and stretching from the Deep South to Harlem.²

Invisible Man, written in the first person, is a kind of *bildungsroman* about an idealistic young Negro (Ellison never gives him a name³) who begins as a student at a black college in the South dutifully hoping to become what once upon a time was known as a "credit to his race." But a naive error leads to his expulsion, and he then makes his way to Harlem. There, instead of eventually finding and forging an identity by which he can be recognized by others, he is subjected to a series of adventures (including a stint in the Communist party, disguised by Ellison for no very good reason as "the Brotherhood") which finally leave him with the realization that he is in fact faceless—that is, invisible—to everyone around him, whether black or white. They all want to make some use of him for whatever ends they happen to be pursuing, but nobody has the slightest desire to see or know him as the individual human being he is. Nor are they any more interested in confronting the realities of the world around them, to which they are as blind as they are to him.

So disillusioned does he become through this realization that he winds up living all by himself in an abandoned cellar. But in the closing pages he de-

² In the introduction to a posthumous collection of Ellison's earliest forays into fiction, *Flying Home and Other Stories* (Random House, 208 pp., \$23.00), John F. Callahan, the book's editor, makes a point similar to the one I am trying to get at in bringing up the name of Mahler: "The young man who had dreamed of composing a symphony by the time he was twenty-six . . . ended up writing *Invisible Man*, a novel with traces of symphonic form as well as the beat and breaks of jazz." *Mutatis mutandis*, the same juxtaposition can be found in Ellison's initially bizarre comparison of Louis Armstrong and T.S. Eliot to which I referred above. "Ever loyal to his musician's bent," writes Callahan, "while his eye read Eliot's fragments, his ear heard Louis Armstrong's 200 choruses on the theme of 'Chinatown.'"

³ In 1959, James Baldwin, perhaps directly or unconsciously influenced by Ellison's idea, would write an essay called "Nobody Knows My Name"—a title he would then use for the collection in which the piece would be reprinted in 1961.

cides to end his hibernation and reemerge, as invisible as ever but capable now of telling his imaginary interlocutor "what was really happening when your eyes were looking through."

The *Invisible Man*'s story unfolds in the manner of a classic picaresque novel, as one vivid character after another bursts with such incandescent clarity onto the scene that the reader's eyes are simply prevented from "looking through." These characters are collectively meant to penetrate the stereotypes that have hidden the great diversity of Negro life in America. They thus cover a very broad range: from the apparently meek but cunningly manipulative and malevolent black college president Dr. Bledsoe, with his bewilderingly complicated sense of the only way a Negro can successfully maneuver his way around a hostile white world; to the wildly colorful and semi-comic, semi-sinister black-nationalist demagogue of West Indian origin, Ras the Exhorter; to the handsome and troubled Communist militant Tod Clifton; to the brilliant con man and hustler Rinehart; to the lovingly warm-hearted Harlem landlady Miss Mary Rambo.

Swelling this huge cast are many other figures, both major and minor, among them a number of whites like Mr. Norton, the wealthy trustee of the protagonist's college, and the Communist leader Brother Jack, who are portrayed with the same clarity: a clarity that can be arrived at only by the nonapologetic "cold eye" of a true novelist working with all his might to achieve precisely that and nothing else (though the paradox is that he accomplishes much else along the way that escapes writers who go whoring after what, from the perspective of an artist, are always strange gods).

All this was astonishing enough. But what seemed equally amazing for a first novel—and what today, knowing as we now do how great a reader Ellison was and how diligently in learning to write fiction he schooled himself in other books, seems all the more amazing—was how underivative it was. If one looked closely enough, one could detect the influence here and there of this writer or that. But the main quality that struck so many of us on a first reading of *Invisible Man* was its originality: no such voice had ever been heard before in American literature. In some of his earliest stories, now collected in the posthumous *Flying Home*, Ellison was obviously imitating Hemingway's prose, and doing it pretty well. But he eventually got Hemingway out of his system, having discovered that the "teasing" character of such prose, "that quality of implying much more than was stated," was not right for expressing what he "really felt"

and was not a flexible enough vehicle for evoking the varieties of experience he wished to represent.

IT WAS about ten years before I reread *Invisible Man*, and I was still sufficiently impressed to vote for it as the best American novel of the post-war period in a poll of critics conducted, if memory serves, by the Sunday book supplement of the now-defunct *New York Herald-Tribune*. Yet I was disappointed to find that it did not hold up as well as I had expected. Or was it that extraliterary considerations had entered, distorting my judgment?

For by this time I had met Ellison, and was seeing him fairly often around New York. To my great surprise, the humorous touch that was so central a part of his talent as a novelist rarely if ever showed itself in private conversation, or in the essays he published from time to time. But this is putting it too mildly. He actually was, at least in my encounters with him, a bit of a stuffed shirt, tending to speak like a character he himself might have lampooned in fiction. Once, while we were discussing something or other about which we disagreed, the author of *Invisible Man* actually delivered himself of the sentence: "As for me, I have values." It was like that, too, when he gave a lecture or wrote a non-fiction piece. On such occasions his prose was almost invariably pompous and pretentious: just the opposite of what it sounded like in his novel.

For all I know, then, the poor impression I had formed of Ellison personally may have had something to do with the somewhat lessened esteem in which I now held his novel. And what may have influenced my slight change of judgment even more was the obvious dislike Ellison felt for me.

Since he never owned up to this dislike or discussed it openly, I never figured out exactly what it was that bothered him. Maybe I simply rubbed him the wrong way, as he did me. But other possibilities entered my mind. One of them was that, in common with many of Saul Bellow's friends and Bellow himself, he never altogether forgave me for the negative review I had written as a fledgling critic in 1953 of *The Adventures of Augie March*. Another was my fairly close association in the early 60's with James Baldwin, who had become his closest rival among contemporary black writers.

Out of some motive I could never fathom, Ellison was grudging about Baldwin even when they were on the same side (as against Richard Wright) in the debate over whether the black writer's main responsibility was to be "ideologically militant" or to work at "writing well." The easy explanation of this stingy attitude on Ellison's part was that it

stemmed from envy of all the attention and praise Baldwin (whose beautifully elegant prose style certainly exempted him from any criticisms based on deficiency of craft) had already been getting in the 40's as an essayist before Ellison pulled ahead, far ahead, with *Invisible Man*. A year later, in 1953, Baldwin's own first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, was published to loud hosannas and even became a best-seller, but no one—myself included—ever thought, or said, that it was in the same class as *Invisible Man*.

In short, Ellison had no apparent cause to envy the early Baldwin. Conceivably the problem was a lack of generosity in Ellison's character—a supposition that is given plausibility by other evidences of that trait that could be detected in his conversation and his essays. But then again the explanation may lie in something personal that was going on between the two men to which I was not privy.

BUT IF I was, and remain, a little puzzled by Ellison's lack of generosity toward the early Baldwin, there was no mystery about it once the younger writer's conversion to a species of black nationalism took place in the early 60's. This new strain then grew more and more virulent in the poisonous attitudes it fostered in Baldwin toward whites (and Jews), as well as in the hectoring and self-pitying tone of the books written under its spell. Such a development could only have repelled Ellison who, after all, identified himself with and spoke for an American Negro tradition "which abhors as obscene any trading on one's own anguish for gain or sympathy." In the spirit of this tradition, he denounced the increasingly fashionable "stance of militancy" as "an easy con-game" for "ambitious, publicity-hungry Negroes."

Ellison did not mention Baldwin's name in this connection, but very likely, as the 60's wore on, it kept moving closer and closer to the top of his private enemies list.⁴ Therefore my own enthusiastic response to Baldwin's first hesitant embrace of what would soon become a fanatically held point of view—that is, his highly sympathetic essay about the Black Muslims, "The Fire Next Time," a piece I myself had actually persuaded him to write, and which caused nothing short of a sensation when it appeared in 1963—may well have made me guilty by association.

If so, I soon compounded the guilt, and now on my own hook, when in that same year, partly in response to "The Fire Next Time" and with Baldwin reciprocally egging me on, I wrote an essay entitled "My Negro Problem—and Ours." Of this essay a

critic once said that it contained something in it to offend everyone, and where Ellison was concerned, there was more than one such something.

Oddly, he did not complain to me about the passage that in retrospect, having just reread practically his entire published output, I would think would most have outraged him. This was the section in which I declared that unlike the Jews, who wished to survive as a distinct group because "they not only believed that God had given them no choice, but . . . were tied to a memory of past glory and imminent redemption," the American Negro had no correspondingly powerful motives for the same wish. "His past is a stigma, his color is a stigma, and his vision of the future is the hope of erasing the stigma by making color irrelevant, by making it disappear as a fact of consciousness."

Surely Ellison must have been enraged by these words, with their sweeping dismissal of his fervent belief in the great richness and precious value of the American Negro's culture and the inestimable contribution it had made, and was still making, to "the wider American culture" (and, as he invariably added, to American democracy too, in calling it to account and demanding that it fulfill its best promise). Yet in at least two discussions I had with him about the piece—discussions he was so reluctant to enter that I had to prod him out of his loud silence by asking flatly where he stood in the heated controversy my essay had generated—he said nothing to me about the insult I had hurled at the culture of the American Negro.

Perhaps the reason he kept silent on this point was that he was assuaged by the sentences that came immediately before (the ones that, in as it were equal-opportunity fashion, most offended many Jewish readers of the piece):

In thinking about the Jews I have often wondered whether their survival as a distinct group was worth one hair on the head of a single infant. Did the Jews have to survive so that six million innocent people should one day be burned in the ovens of Auschwitz?

Or perhaps, as a devout pluralist, he did not consider it worth debating this particular issue with someone who could be so obtuse and impious not just about Negroes but about his own people as well. Or perhaps he felt he had already taken suffi-

⁴ In all fairness, I should note that Ellison did on various occasions make some sort of effort to suggest that he was not hostile to Baldwin. But whenever he did, one could sense that his heart was not in it. Nor can I recall a word of actual praise for Baldwin—I mean Baldwin when he was at his very best—either in private or in any of his published writings.

cient care of the matter in the angry reply he had written to an essay by the socialist critic Irving Howe, "Black Boys and Native Sons," that was published shortly after "My Negro Problem—and Ours" and that also used the word "stigma." Knowing I had read that reply when we talked about my own piece, Ellison may well have assumed that I understood it as applying with equal, if not greater, force to me and have decided not to waste any further breath on it.

Even so, he did let me have it about the notorious last paragraph of my essay, where—driven by the logic of my prior analysis of race relations in America—I concluded that the only solution to "the Negro problem" was the wholesale mixing of whites and blacks through intermarriage. *Don't you realize*, he asked with a decidedly unfriendly grin but in a completely civil tone—I am paraphrasing from memory here—*that this would be no solution to anything, since the babies who would be produced by these intermarriages would still be considered black? All you would accomplish would be to increase the size of the black population, which would probably make things politically worse.* I must confess that this criticism—which he was the only one to come up with, though a thousand different objections to the essay were raised by others—caught me completely off-guard and that I had no answer to it.

WHAT FINALLY tore it between us, however, was my review about a year later (1964) of *Shadow and Act*, his first collection of essays and his first book of any kind since *Invisible Man* had come out twelve years earlier. Ellison was as thin-skinned as the next writer, and he could not have taken kindly to my statement that he had "never mastered the art of the essay enough for his best qualities to find expression in it." Never mind that I professed myself a great admirer of his fiction and that I also praised him "as an extraordinarily principled man, a man of great seriousness, stubborn rectitude, and intellectual determination." Given his virtually religious devotion to craft, none of this could have canceled out my attack on the stilted and awkward prose of *Shadow and Act*.

Nor could he have failed to be angered by the corollary I drew here from the point I had made in "My Negro Problem—and Ours" about the price of Jewish survival. By now, largely under the influence of Ellison's own essays, I was ready—even eager—to concede that the Negro past was more than a "stigma," and that there were "marvelous qualities" in Negro culture. But I also denied, in the teeth of Ellison's assertions to the contrary, that

these qualities could survive the disappearance of the oppression that "in some awful sense" had produced them in the first place.

As if all this were not enough to finish me off in his eyes, I (now entrenched in the radical phase of my complicated political evolution) devoted a large section of the piece to siding with Howe in his dispute with Ellison. In "Black Boys and Native Sons," Howe had defended Richard Wright and the "protest novel" against both Ellison and Baldwin. It was more incumbent on the Negro writer, said Howe with a vigorous nod from me, to call attention, as Wright had done, to the terrible and inescapable pain suffered by his people in America than to cultivate the aesthetic virtues to which these two black critics of Wright's work attributed a higher importance (though Baldwin, as Howe did not fail to recognize, had already been moving in the other direction—that is, toward Wright's position).

Nevertheless, even if I now had a slightly lower opinion of *Invisible Man*, I still thought it was a very good novel, and better than almost anything else written in that period. No longer, however—and on this, I feel sure, I was exercising a disinterested critical judgment, without any taint of personal pique—did I regard it as a true masterpiece. All the indisputably great works of my acquaintance got better with repeated rereadings over the years: I would discover things in them as I grew older that I had been too young or inexperienced or ignorant to perceive or appreciate or even understand the first time around. With *Invisible Man*, by contrast, the freshness of it had faded somewhat in the ten years since I had last read it, and with that freshness went the illuminating shock of the first reading. The prose was still what it had been—vivid and charged with the energy of the superficially incongruous elements out of which Ellison had brilliantly forged it. The story too was still beautifully paced and structured. But now some of the characters had become less interesting, largely because, while still delightfully colorful on the surface, they were rarely examined in depth.

Then, too, there was the problem of the symbolism Ellison had clearly worked so hard to incorporate into the central idea of the hero as an Invisible Man living in a hole in the ground, and also in several much-praised scenes (like the one that takes place in a bizarre paint factory), which now came across as strained and even gratuitous. It was as if this symbolic dimension had sprung more out of deference to the high-literary dogmas and fashions of the 40's and 50's than out of the organic imperatives of the narrative. (Not for nothing did Ellison

once say that both he and Baldwin had been created as much by the library as by the environments in which they had grown up; and I know from first-hand acquaintance with both men that Ellison read many more symbolically-minded critics like Kenneth Burke and Edmund Wilson, and took them more seriously, than Baldwin ever did.)

MEANWHILE, THERE had arisen the great question of when Ellison's next novel would appear. The word, coming from Ellison himself and his closest friends, was that he had actually started it even before beginning *Invisible Man*, and that he had now returned to this aborted project and was working steadily on it. But since he was a notoriously slow writer (*Invisible Man* had taken him seven years to complete), and since this was to be a much longer book than its predecessor, there was no telling how many more years we would have to wait for its appearance.

Despite the eight excerpts from this work-in-progress that appeared in various literary magazines between 1960 and 1977, the suspicion spread that Ellison had been afflicted by a writer's block that was preventing him from developing and putting them all together into a finished novel. There was nothing unusual about this: many writers had been known to experience great difficulty in following up on a first novel, especially one so successful as *Invisible Man*. Writing was hard enough under normal conditions, but the inevitable compulsion to satisfy the expectations aroused by an impressive debut was well-calculated to induce paralysis, sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent.

Until Ellison came along, the most famous second-novel block in American literature had been the one that silenced Henry Roth, whose *Call It Sleep*, published in 1934, had (like *Invisible Man*) been recognized as a masterpiece by certain critics but (unlike *Invisible Man*) had been a disastrous commercial failure. Unable to finish the second novel he then set out to write, Roth gave up in despair and disgust, becoming, among other things, a poultry farmer. Ellison had no need to seek refuge and income in a territory so distant from the literary world. While working on his second novel, he made his living by teaching at one university after another while also collecting the royalties and the prize money that kept pouring in from his first.

But would he ever finish what looked to be an endless project, assuming that he had even made a real start on it? I for one had my doubts, and then came the great disaster that increased those doubts. Here is John F. Callahan on what happened:

In his own mind Ellison was moving toward completion in . . . 1967 as he revised the novel at his summer home . . . in the Berkshires. Then, in the late afternoon of November 29, 1967, Ellison and his wife, Fanny, returned from shopping to find the house in flames. . . . Ten days after the event, he wrote . . . that "the loss was particularly severe for me, as a section of my work-in-progress was destroyed with it."

The section, he told an interviewer shortly before his death in 1994, had amounted to 362 pages, of which he had no copy. (In another version of the story, he did have a copy of the pages themselves but not of the revisions he had made on the one that perished in the fire.) Even so, he had told another interviewer in 1980: "I guess I've been able to put most of it back together again."⁵

Saul Bellow also recently revealed—further refuting my suspicion that the second novel had not even been seriously begun—that in 1959 or 1960 Ellison had given him "a couple of hundred pages, at least" to read. It now appears that by the time Ellison died about five years ago, the still unfinished manuscript consisted of some 2,000 pages in all. At one point, around 1970, he had considered publishing the whole thing in three volumes, but then changed his mind because he wanted each volume to "have a compelling interest in itself," which, he feared, would not be the case. And so, for the next 24 years, he continued to write and expand and revise without ever completing the book to his own satisfaction.

This may not exactly seem like a block—a word that conjures up the inability to write at all—but it is one of the forms that a block can sometimes take. I know of a novelist who turned out several hundred thousand words without—or rather to avoid—coming to the end, and I would guess that something similar was involved in Ellison's 2,000 pages. *Invisible Man* was a very tough act to follow, made tougher yet by the honors that had been heaped upon him; and he simply proved unable to follow it. He differed from Henry Roth, who was rendered mute for

⁵ It may be instructive to compare Ellison's experience with a similar disaster that befell Thomas Carlyle more than a hundred years earlier. In March 1834, Carlyle lent the only copy of the manuscript of the first volume of his history of the French Revolution, on which he had been laboring for three years, to John Stuart Mill, whose maid accidentally burned it. Without any notes or earlier drafts, Carlyle still managed to rewrite the entire volume in just four months, and he then went on to complete the entire work with two more volumes by the end of the same year. For Ellison, obviously, putting "most of it back together again" after the fire that destroyed his manuscript did not have the same result that Carlyle so miraculously achieved under comparable circumstances. But as has often been observed, when it came to writing, the Victorians were as different from us as they were in their moral convictions.

a very long time, in that he could produce pages. But what he could never manage to do was produce another finished work that would justify the tremendous fuss made over him as a result of a single book written ages before.

At this juncture, we witness a fascinating reversal of roles between Ellison and Henry Roth. Late in life, Roth found his tongue again (curiously through learning how to use a computer), and proceeded to pour forth what had been pent up for so many years into a very lengthy autobiographical novel (published serially in several volumes) that in my judgment was as wooden and amateurish as his youthful first novel had been alive and precociously accomplished. It was a sad, even pathetic, denouement to the story of a career that might better have been left in the poignantly and romantically legendary state in which it had previously been frozen.

By sharp contrast, Ellison, with all the makings of a book in hand, was unable to bring it to a conclusion and present it to the world. Now, however, the dedicated and indefatigable John Callahan has carved a fairly short novel out of the 2,000 manuscript pages Ellison left behind and issued it under the title *Juneteenth*.⁶

Juneteenth takes off from the attempted assassination (apparently in the 1950's) of a race-baiting United States Senator named Sunraider who represents a New England state (one of several implausible details in the book through which Ellison must have wanted to say something—probably concerning racism in the North—that he never gets around to saying) by a young black man about whom we never learn anything else here.⁷ Lying in the hospital close to death, Sunraider sends for an old black minister, the Reverend Hickman, who a few days earlier had come to Washington with members of his congregation in order to warn the Senator of the danger facing him (though we never find out how they knew), but had been unable to get past his secretary.

Now, through a combination of Hickman's soothing discourse to the partly comatose Sunraider and the fevered reminiscences that float through the Senator's mind, we learn that this racist politician had as a child been raised in the South under the name of Bliss by "Daddy" Hickman and had worked with him as a boy preacher. One day he had run away, changed his name, and had eventually become a United States Senator. Left in suspense is whether Sunraider is a light-skinned Negro who has successfully passed for white, or a white foundling who had in effect been

adopted by Hickman. But at least this question is finally resolved.⁸ Not so with Sunraider's story. We long to hear it after getting to know him as a child, but the gaps in the narrative are so wide that the steps of his vast journey are never traced. All we are given is a few pages about one of these steps: at some point, Sunraider had been in the movie business. Yet how and why he got there, and how and why this had led him into politics, remain untold.

By comparison with *Invisible Man*, which teems with a multitude of characters, *Juneteenth* is sparsely populated. A number of female members of Hickman's congregation are vividly drawn, but only Hickman himself and the boy Bliss are evoked with any real fullness. Hickman, in his youth a jazz musician and sinner before converting and becoming a "Revrend," speaks in the marvelously pungent and seductively rhythmic idiom of the best black Southern preachers, but as a character he is too good to be true—so good that the portrait of him verges on sentimentality. So does the sketchier portrait of Sunraider as the boy Bliss.

But these weaknesses of *Juneteenth*, which can mainly be ascribed to its unfinished state, are the least of its problems. I have already noted that one of the most extraordinary features of *Invisible Man* is that, unlike most first novels, it was not derivative. Ellison might have been a creature of the library, and his earliest stories might have sounded like talented imitations of Hemingway, but in writing *Invisible Man* he had triumphantly banished the voices of other novelists from his head and had been rewarded with the discovery of his own style and his own voice. How could it have happened, then, that he would go on to write a novel that is as derivative as the stories of his novitiate?

In the case of *Juneteenth*, the ghost haunting the prose is not Hemingway, however, but Faulkner.

⁶ Random House, 352 pp., \$25.00.

⁷ However, according to a piece in the *New York Times Magazine* by Gregory Feeley, who has read everything Callahan decided to leave out of *Juneteenth*, there is a great deal about the young assassin in the pages that remain in manuscript. Other pages were omitted, too, that may fill in some of the gaps I mention below. And Callahan also omitted from his edition of *Juneteenth* four of the eight published excerpts mentioned above, among them the much-admired "Cadillac Flambé." Callahan promises, though, to include all this material, along with different versions of some of the sections he chose to use, in a special "scholar's edition" that he will eventually issue.

⁸ That is, as I read the book. Feeley disagrees: he says that the question is left hanging. But as others read it, the answer is the opposite of the one I think Ellison gives. One of these three interpretations should be right, but it is also possible that Ellison never finally made up his mind, and that this is why so much confusion has been generated.

The author of the multivolume Yoknapatawpha saga is there in Ellison's very desire to produce a multivolume saga of his own, but his presence can be felt even more intrusively in the prose of *Juneteenth*. Here is a typical passage:

Oh, she said. . . . You not from Chicago?

Never been there, I said. And looking at her nibbling the sandwich, her soft eyes on my face, I thought of some of them. *We had had a rough time, coming through all of that cloudburst of rain, having to avoid the towns where I might have been recognized and the unfriendly towns where the oil rigs pounded night and day, making the trip longer and our money shorter and shorter. Getting stuck in the mud here and having engine trouble there, the tires going twice and the top being split by hailstones the size of baseballs and almost losing all of the equipment off a shaky ferry when we crossed a creek in Missouri* [italics in the original].

The hands may be the hands of Ellison, but from large elements like the cadences of the italicized interior monologue—sired by James Joyce out of Ireland on another thoroughbred across the ocean and in the American South—down to smaller stylistic details like the omission of quotation marks in the dialogue and the heavy reliance on gerunds, the voice is the voice of William Faulkner.

READING *Juneteenth* under the impression that it was the product of a 40-year gestation by a perfectionist who was laboring without letup to satisfy his own demands on himself, I found this regression to literary derivativeness very puzzling. But then at the end I came to Callahan's afterword, where he informs us that "Except for a very few, very brief passages, written in the early 1990's, the novel is not Ellison's most recent effort." Actually it was mostly composed as early as 1959 and designated as the second of the three-volume saga Ellison had been aiming at.

It is a stretch, then, for its publisher to call *Juneteenth* a "new novel" (as Henry Roth's final series genuinely was) or the product of a 40-year effort. What we have here instead is an unfinished section of a never-to-be completed larger novel that Ellison wrote in the years immediately after *Invisible Man*. It can thus more accurately be described as an early—or, if one prefers, middle-period—than a late work.

Yet it is still very hard for me to understand how, having succeeded in the immensely arduous job of finding his own voice and staying with it throughout the seven years it took him to complete his first

novel, Ellison should have then lost it and become possessed in working on his second by the *daimon* of another writer. But that the other writer should have been Faulkner is not so mysterious when we consider the deep admiration Ellison had always felt for him even despite the atavistic traces of racism of which the great Southern novelist was never fully able to rid himself.

Other parts of the 2,000-page manuscript he left behind may prove me wrong, but for now my speculation is that Ellison—a man of great intelligence and literary erudition who had an ear second to none—knew that Faulkner had invaded and taken him over and that this was why he could never finish the book. I can imagine him struggling for 40 years to get Faulkner's sound out of his head; I can imagine him searching desperately for the lost voice he had created in *Invisible Man*; I can imagine him trying to fool himself into thinking that he had finally found it again, and then realizing that he had not; and I can imagine him being reduced to despair at this literary enslavement into which some incorrigible defect in his nature had sold him—and to a Southern master, at that!

I offer this theory with sadness in my heart, and I am even unhappier at having to report that after revisiting *Invisible Man* yet again in recent weeks, the faults that had become apparent on my second reading loomed even larger, and its virtues were commensurately diminished. Worse yet, the book now struck me as dated. Let me try to explain why.

Insofar as the central theme of *Invisible Man* is the significance and implications of the black presence in America—which of course it mainly is ("the most complex, multilayered, and challenging novel about race and being and the preservation of democratic ideals in America," in the words of one of its admirers)—its very title, and its defining symbol, has now acquired an almost quaintly archaic aura.

For if Negroes—or blacks or African Americans—were once invisible, today, in the age of affirmative action and multiculturalism, they have become perhaps the most salient group in the American consciousness. If their literary culture was previously held at naught, it is now studied and celebrated beyond what Ellison—judging from his own harsh remarks about the need for his fellow black writers to become better craftsmen—would probably have deemed its intrinsic merits. If the way of life growing out of their oppressed condition was once dismissed as nothing but a stigma and hence demanded to be brought into view with the undeniable force of conviction about its richness that lay behind the picture painted by *Invisible*

Man, this way of life has now become a national obsession at which no one ever stops looking and about which no one ever stops talking.

On the other hand—and this dates the book even more—there is hardly a trace in *Invisible Man* of the one aspect of that way of life which has done more in the years since the book was published to affect race relations in this country: black violence and criminality, the fear of which has spread even among the most sympathetic white liberals. Yes, *Invisible Man* contains hustlers and pimps and tricksters and con artists, but (like Rinehart, who embodies them all in his own individual person) they are represented as ingenious and admirably resourceful, not as menacing or dangerous.

BUT COULD not the same charge of datedness be leveled against almost any novel written in the past about the past? The answer is no—not, in any event, when we are dealing with those that are truly great. And because Ellison once praised Richard Wright for his eagerness to compete with the best, and because this eagerness was even more intense in Ellison himself, I think it fair to pit *Invisible Man* against such indisputably great novels as—to cite a few very different ones off the top of my head—James's *The Bostonians*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, and Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*.

In each of these books, the social conditions of the world being portrayed, and the attitudes that underlay and supported them, are dead and gone and so obsolete that one might suppose a reader of our own day would be incapable of identifying with the characters whose plight is determined by them. In *Anna Karenina*, for example, the entire plot hinges on an adultery that is taken with a literally deadly seriousness hardly imaginable to a contemporary American. Yet the human tragedy Tolstoy depicts, fully anchored though it is in social circumstances and moral attitudes that could not be more radically different from our own, reaches so deeply into the never-changing human realities beneath them that the reader is gripped by it from the first word to the last. Something similar happens with all the other novels I have listed. But alas, it does not happen with *Invisible Man*. Good though it is in so many respects, it does not survive this acid test of greatness.

The reason it saddens me to say these things is that I would have wished at this point in my own life to celebrate Ellison, not to denigrate him. For I feel that I owe him a posthumous apology for having, during my sojourn on the Left in the 60's,

taken the side of Howe and Baldwin against him when he was so bravely standing almost alone in resisting the politicization of everything and holding out for the writer's responsibility as a writer to his art above any other consideration.

The upshot is that though Ellison has been diminished somewhat in my eyes as a novelist, studying his essays again has had the opposite effect on my opinion of him as an intellectual and as a man. I cannot tell a lie: much of the prose of those essays has not in my reluctant opinion become any less stilted and awkward and pretentious over the years. But the general position they take has acquired a luminosity and a nobility that were, if not exactly "invisible" to me when I first read them, then much less striking.

Indeed, if *Invisible Man* has been rendered dated by the place to which, for better and worse, we have come in America, many passages in Ellison's essays have acquired a greater power in that very same place than they had when he wrote them. I quoted above from one such passage in another context, but it is so perfect an embodiment of the quality I wish to capture that I am going to quote it again. It comes from the section in which Ellison chides Irving Howe for suggesting (in Ellison's paraphrase) "that unrelieved suffering is the only 'real' Negro experience, and that the true Negro writer must be ferocious." To this Ellison counters with the following little lecture:

But there is also an American Negro tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain. It is a tradition which abhors as obscene any trading on one's anguish for gain or sympathy; which springs not from a desire to deny the harshness of existence but from a will to deal with it as men at their best have always done. It takes fortitude to be a man and no less to be an artist. If so, there are no exemptions.

It is in this same reply to Howe that he later speaks (in a sentence from which I also quoted above) of "what an easy con-game for ambitious, publicity-hungry Negroes this stance of 'militancy' has become." If this was the situation in 1964, the name of Al Sharpton alone tells us how much worse things have become in the intervening 35 years.

ALL HONOR, then, to Ralph Ellison. If *Invisible Man* is not the great novel it has been taken to be, it still ranks among the best we have had in the past half-century; and if Ellison falls far short even of that in *Juneteenth*, he is still a magnificent

intellectual and moral and political exemplar. It is—and now I arrive at long last to the paradox I mentioned at the beginning—that aspect of his life and work, and not his fiction, which, in looking back at his entire career, now stands out as the most admirable and impressive.

Hearing this would have distressed Ellison no end, and he would almost certainly have felt offended by it, if only because it was to the novel that he committed himself as to a religious calling. It was also as a novelist that he wanted to make his contribution not only to the literature of the America he always loved (even when he was growing up under segregation in Oklahoma) but to the struggle of the Negro people he loved, and “affirmed,” with equal intensity. Refusing to be mollified by Irving Howe’s praise of *Invisible Man* as “miraculous,” Ellison shot back: “If there is anything ‘miraculous’ about the book, it is the result of hard work undertaken in the belief that the work of art is important in itself, that it is a social action in itself.”

I shout Amen to that, but I end with an even deeper and more reverent bow to the proud and self-respecting tradition out of which Ellison spoke and from which he could never be budged: a tradition that exposes the aggressive black nationalists and separatists and mau-mauers who have grown

more numerous today than ever for the whiners and braggarts and self-haters Ellison despised them as being. If he had done nothing more than keep that tradition alive by his steady reminders of its existence, he would deserve all the prizes he won, and a few more as well.

Without a doubt Ellison’s response to such an estimate of him would have been a furious “No thanks, Jack.” Apart from the blow it would have dealt to his pride in *Invisible Man*, he would have seen and gone after it as just another ruse in the elevating of ideology over art; the fact that in this round it was his own ideology being elevated rather than Richard Wright’s or Irving Howe’s or the later James Baldwin’s would have made no difference, or anyway not enough of one to pacify him or keep his dander down.

As for me, having been wrong once before on this issue from the other political side, I would even be willing to say that I was now wrong again—if, that is, and only if, *Invisible Man* were indeed a great novel. But like it or not (and it was, remember, Ellison himself who asserted that in the matter of artistic standards “there are no exemptions”), the thanks we owe him are not so much for *Invisible Man* as for the kind of *visible* man he himself was in the literary, political, and intellectual history of this country.

Triangulating the Constitution

Gary Rosen

FOR THE better part of this century, there has been no more reliable litmus test in American politics than attitudes toward the Supreme Court. In the now-familiar shorthand, liberals stand for activism in constitutional matters, conservatives for restraint.

In practice, this has meant that liberals view the federal judiciary as an engine for social change, especially on behalf of minorities and those with little economic power. Judges, they maintain, must look at the Constitution at a high level of abstraction, teasing out the fullest implications of principles like “equal protection” and “due process” and of the federal powers described in seemingly narrow provisions like the commerce clause. This approach, in cases stretching from the New Deal to the Warren Court and into the present, has often meant thwarting the will of majorities as expressed through their local or state governments. But as the activists see it, democratic majorities must yield when their actions fly in the face of fundamental liberties.

Conservatives have quarreled not so much with this principle itself as with how liberals define its key terms. In the first place, they argue, there is no more fundamental liberty than democratic self-govern-

ment, and judges who strike down its results should exercise extreme caution, relying not on vague standards of enlightened opinion but on explicit provisions of the Constitution. The meaning of these provisions, moreover, is not to be found in the philosophical musings of contemporary legal theorists but rather in the concrete history of the Constitution, especially as conceived at the Founding, whose guiding principles were federalism and limited government. By seeking this “original understanding,” conservatives assert, judges show proper deference to the sovereign people, the creators of the Constitution and the source of its legitimacy.

But now something remarkable is taking place. The liberal side of the equation appears to be shifting—and, seemingly, in a conservative direction. On the evidence of several new books by leading law professors, some liberals are having second thoughts about the reasoning that has for so long carried forward the liberal constitutional project. Leaving behind their predecessors’ distrust of both present-day majorities and the Founding Fathers, these writers have begun to meet conservatives on their own turf. Liberals, too, it turns out, can proclaim their deference to the will of the people and wrap themselves in the mantle of history.

The question, of course, is how they go about it—and also what their academic arguments will accomplish when, as has happened so often in the past, those arguments make their way into the hands of judges.

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FROM A political standpoint, the chief vulnerability of liberals in discussing the Constitution has always been the charge of elitism. For several generations, after all, nothing has so united the liberal legal academy as its fear of popular majorities. When it comes to protecting the nation's precious rights and hard-won social entitlements—so the implicit creed has gone—ordinary Americans simply cannot be counted upon.

It is thus no small thing to find well-known liberal law professors paying tribute to the idea of popular sovereignty. According to Bruce Ackerman, who teaches law and political science at Yale, the people of the United States have *always* been the central actor in the unfolding of our constitutional system. Indeed, he argues in *We the People: Transformations*,* the second volume of a projected three-volume work, on certain occasions in our history they have engaged in an unusual process of “higher lawmaking.” Acting at the behest of leaders impatient both with the constitutional status quo and with the prescribed methods for changing it, the American people have refashioned the political order in an informed, self-conscious exercise of their sovereign authority.

The particular constitutional “moments” that Ackerman has in mind are the Founding, Reconstruction, and the New Deal, and he recounts the decisive events of each in impressive detail. He reminds us, for example, that the terms for amendment described by the Articles of Confederation, under which Americans lived for most of the 1780's, were unceremoniously ignored by the Philadelphia Convention once it had received various tokens of popular support. Similarly, post-Civil War Republicans, operating with the people's blessing after a decisive electoral victory, coerced the Southern states into ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, the centerpiece of their program to protect newly freed blacks. Finally, Franklin D. Roosevelt “redeem[ed] the voice of the People” through a series of “transformative” appointments to the Supreme Court, eventually winning from the Justices a body of favorable rulings analogous to constitutional amendments and intended to give unambiguous authority to the modern welfare and regulatory state.

The lesson that Ackerman draws from these crucial chapters in our history is that the people should have a more direct way to amend the Constitution than the one the Constitution itself provides in Article Five, with its elaborate requirements for supermajorities at the state and federal levels. He recommends supplementing Article Five

with what he calls his “Popular Sovereignty Initiative.” Under it, a second-term President would be allowed to propose amendments that, when approved by Congress and then by the electorate in two successive quadrennial elections, would become a formal part of the Constitution. In this way, Ackerman writes, “We the People can reclaim our power to rewrite the Constitution in ways that express our modern constitutional identities. We can become masters of our own house.”

AKHIL REED AMAR, a young star of the Yale law-school faculty, goes even farther in recognizing popular authority over the Constitution. In two new books, he sets out to demonstrate, among other things, that the American Founders meant for the people to sit in constant judgment over their government and, when appropriate, to undertake remedial action in their own name.

In *The Bill of Rights: Creation and Reconstruction*,† the more scholarly of the books, Amar explores in depth the views of those responsible for the first ten amendments. As he correctly observes, the Bill of Rights was intended to mollify fears that the new Constitution would create, in his words, “a monstrous central regime.” Thus, of the many amendments proposed by James Madison, the very first declared that “the people have an indubitable, unalienable, and indefeasible right to reform or change their Government.” Though this amendment did not make the final cut, its radical essence, Amar contends, is preserved in the First Amendment right of peaceable assembly and in the broad language of the Ninth and Tenth Amendments, which speak of the rights and powers “retained” and “reserved” by the people. Taken together with the Preamble's dramatic opening phrases—“We the People of the United States . . . do ordain and establish this Constitution”—these texts suggest to Amar that what the popular sovereign has made, it may “disestablish at will.”

The practical upshot of this analysis forms an important part of *For the People: What the Constitution Really Says About Your Rights*,** written by Amar and the journalist Alan Hirsch and intended, as its title suggests, for a more general audience. As Amar and Hirsch see it, the constant invocation of “the people” in the Bill of Rights points to a now all-but-forgotten 18th-century ideal of virtuous,

* Harvard University Press, 515 pp., \$29.95. Reviewed by Adam Wolfson in the July 1998 COMMENTARY.

† Yale University Press, 412 pp., \$30.00.

** Free Press, 259 pp., \$26.00.

vigilant citizenship. The paramount concern of this "Republican Tradition," as they call it (borrowing a term of art from a prominent school of historians), was to ensure that the people remained firmly in control in the face of a potentially "self-dealing" government.

For Amar and Hirsch, this historical context sheds new light on Article Five, which they, like Ackerman, consider an excessively onerous route to amendment. For them, the significant fact is that Article Five nowhere declares itself the *only* method for changing our fundamental law. What this means is that a simple majority of the American people, acting outside Congress and the state legislatures, enjoys "the inalienable legal right" to amend the Constitution. Conditions may be placed on this right in order to promote proper deliberation, but fear of rash or oppressive measures should not stand in the way of upholding our most glorious "first principle." For too long, the authors hold, the people's "constitutional muscles" have been allowed "to atrophy through disuse."

A STILL more unconditional endorsement of the people's prerogatives flows from the pen of Mark Tushnet, a professor at the Georgetown University Law Center and a leading figure in the revisionist movement known as Critical Legal Studies. For Tushnet, the great problem with constitutional law today is its focus on the Supreme Court. Indeed, in *Taking the Constitution Away from the Courts*,* he proposes abandoning the very institution of judicial review, under which the Court has final say on matters of constitutionality. Tushnet wants to replace this "elitist" approach, established by Chief Justice John Marshall's famed ruling in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803), with what he calls "populist constitutional law."

Under Tushnet's scheme, the judiciary would still resolve ordinary legal disputes, but the Constitution would become a creature of the people's representatives, its meaning no more or less than "what a majority of Congress says it is." Tushnet knows his proposal will be greeted as heresy by his fellow liberals, but he is convinced that their devotion to judicial review is misplaced. After all, even those Court rulings most venerated by liberals have made little difference by themselves. Segregation in the South yielded in the end not to the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) but to the civil-rights legislation of the 1960's; and *Roe v. Wade* (1973), though overturning abortion laws throughout the states, was decided as it was only because it reflected the "latent" wishes of a majority of Amer-

icans. "Looking at judicial review over the course of U.S. history," Tushnet writes, the courts have generally been "in line with what the dominant national political coalition wants."

More fundamentally, Tushnet finds something perverse in giving a small, isolated group of jurists the authority to decide the most controversial issues faced by a democratic society. In such cases, he avers, the Supreme Court usually relies on its "all-things-considered" judgment, weighing today's needs against the demands of history and precedent. But what uniquely qualifies *it* for this task? Given serious constitutional responsibilities, Tushnet insists, the people and their representatives will assuredly rise to the task.

IF AN emphasis on popular sovereignty is one side of the new turn in liberal constitutional thought, the other is history, an area that has long been the special domain of conservative students of the Constitution—and one that has a more direct bearing on how actual cases are decided. Here, Akhil Reed Amar and Bruce Ackerman are the writers of interest. Both offer a kind of liberal "originalism," anchoring their ideas in narratives that capture, they believe, the distinctive rhythms of our constitutional tradition.

As I have already noted, Amar's *The Bill of Rights* takes with commendable seriousness the Founding era's view of the first ten amendments. But his account does not stop with popular sovereignty. His broader point is that the Bill of Rights as originally conceived was not meant to protect citizens from the overreaching of *every* level of American government, only from the newly created national regime. Amendments usually viewed today as ringing affirmations of individual rights sprang, he emphasizes, not from some profound libertarian impulse but from a wish to preserve states' rights and to confine the new national government to its enumerated powers. To take one of Amar's many examples: the First Amendment means precisely what it says when it declares that "*Congress* shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." States could certainly give official support to religion, and many did.

But matters became considerably more complex in the second great epoch Amar explores: the period of Reconstruction after the Civil War and particularly the campaign for passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. Center stage in his account belongs to John Bingham, the Republican Con-

* Princeton University Press, 242 pp., \$29.95.

gressman from Ohio who drafted the amendment's key phrases. For Bingham, Amar shows, newly freed blacks (and their Northern sympathizers) could hope to be secure in the South only if they were guaranteed a full range of civil rights. The solution, as Bingham saw it, was to impose the federal Bill of Rights on the states, a feat achieved, in his eyes, by the Fourteenth Amendment's command that "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States."

According to Amar, this "grand idea" of national privileges and immunities transformed the American constitutional order. The original Bill of Rights, grounded in the principles of federalism and limited national government, took on an entirely new dimension, becoming more "liberal and individualistic" and addressing "the distinct problem of minority rights."

From a legal standpoint, all this makes Amar an energetic advocate of "incorporation"—the controversial doctrine under which the Supreme Court has in fact applied against states and localities most provisions of the Bill of Rights, from free-speech standards to the details of criminal procedure. Amar does not like the slapdash and seemingly unprincipled way in which the Justices have gone about this task, and he differs with them on a few specific matters (surprisingly, he reproves the Court for ignoring the right to keep and bear arms, and roundly criticizes the restrictions it has placed on the conduct of "searches and seizures"). But for the most part, his analysis reaches the same result as the Justices have reached.

In *For the People*, Amar and Hirsch take this "originalist" message a step farther. Our "Republican Tradition" is still available to us, they maintain; all we need do is to revive certain institutions whose original purposes have been eclipsed by modern ideas.

The first of these is the jury, which, though now primarily considered a safeguard for the accused, was seen by the authors of the Constitution as "a vital public space" where ordinary Americans would come together to learn about their common concerns and reaffirm the government's dependence on their will. For Amar and Hirsch, this not only explains the salience of the jury system in the Bill of Rights, but also points to a number of long-dormant constitutional rights, including the right of jurors both to declare a law unconstitutional and to engage in "nullification"—acquitting a defendant despite the evidence—when justice demands it in a particular case.

No less central to the Founding design, Amar and Hirsch contend, was militia service, held up by the Second Amendment as "necessary to the security of a free state." The point of these locally organized and self-armed military units was not, however, just to supplement regular forces but also to provide the people with an ultimate check on the federal government and promote "their knowledge of and commitment to civic affairs." In our own day, with militias having long since disappeared, these 18th-century doctrines translate into a constitutional *right* to serve in the military—a right requiring, among other things, the admission of homosexuals into the armed forces and of female soldiers into combat.

IF AMAR's aim is to provide firm historical support for an expansive notion of federally guaranteed rights, Bruce Ackerman's is to do the same for federal power. Though he devotes hundreds of pages to the extraordinary demands of constitution-making during the Founding and Reconstruction, his main effort is bent toward vindicating the New Deal in all its breadth. Franklin Roosevelt may have made his own constitutional rules, Ackerman concedes, but in so doing he was following in the footsteps of the Founders and post-Civil War Republicans—and no one questions the legitimacy of *their* "higher lawmaking."

But Roosevelt, as Ackerman would have it, also added something to the precedents set by earlier constitutional revolutions: namely, the insight that the people's sovereign acts need not be recorded in the black-letter text of the Constitution itself. Despite the overwhelming popularity of his activist agenda, Roosevelt opted not to authorize it through the amendment process of Article Five, pointedly refusing to support any of the constitutional changes proposed at the time—including an amendment that would have explicitly empowered Congress "to regulate agriculture, commerce, industry, and labor." Instead, according to Ackerman, Roosevelt effectively amended the Constitution by way of the Supreme Court, naming Justices who understood that on the great question of federal responsibility for the economy, the people had spoken.

Ackerman acknowledges that Roosevelt's modernizing of the Constitution came at a price. Since his day, Presidents have viewed appointments to the Supreme Court as an opportunity to follow his example, nominating jurists who they expect will find new meanings (or revive old ones) in the same familiar text. Unhealthy, too, has been the loss of "crisp markers" indicating exactly when a major

constitutional change has occurred, and what its contours are. But that is where Ackerman's "Popular Sovereignty Initiative" comes in: with the President leading the people in bringing about a formal change in the Constitution, we can remedy the defects of Roosevelt's example while preserving its essence.

"WE THE people," "what the Constitution really says about your rights," "taking the Constitution away from the courts"—such rhetoric has long been the stuff of conservative stump speeches and bumper stickers. Does its adoption by prominent members of the liberal legal guild truly signal a new openness to the principles of American self-government and popular rule? Alas, it does not.

What is most curious about the proposals of Ackerman, Amar, and Tushnet is that they do not correspond to any declared wish or discernible need of the popular sovereign in whose name they claim to speak. Though each writer hastens to tear down the obstacles in the way of constitution-making by a simple national majority, none dares to suggest that the people themselves are clamoring for this privilege. There is, in fact, no crisis in our basic political institutions to prompt what Ackerman calls a constitutional "moment."

Indeed, to the extent that popular dissatisfaction has been voiced with the workings of our constitutional system, the changes proposed in these books promise to exacerbate it. What Ackerman's "Popular Sovereignty Initiative," Amar's "inalienable" right to amend, and Tushnet's "populist" constitutional law have in common is a desire to overcome federalism. All would draw constitutional decision-making away from states and localities and toward the national center, the very trend that has sparked protests in recent decades on issues ranging from pornography and abortion to busing and school prayer.

Amar and Ackerman would do this in a fairly direct way, substituting national referenda on constitutional amendments for the elaborate state-based ratification procedures of Article Five. Tushnet's plan for eliminating judicial review would achieve the same result: although removing constitutional oversight by the federal courts might give states and localities maneuvering room for a time, Congress would quickly take up the slack. What all three refuse to acknowledge is that, insofar as contemporary Americans have concerns about self-government under the Constitution, the critical question is not how best to develop a national standard on a given issue but whether and to what degree a national standard should prevail in the first place.

Amar suggests that his proposal for national referenda would encourage federal judges to strike down laws as unconstitutional, since "We the People" could more easily overturn these rulings if necessary. But under his scheme, local dissent would enjoy no such option: in fact, Amar celebrates the Supreme Court's controversial decision in *Romer v. Evans* (1996) declaring that the people of Colorado could not amend their state constitution to ban special legal protection for homosexuals. For his part, Tushnet dismisses traditional concerns about federalism with a wave of his hand, declining to surrender the defining issues of public life to "the mere preferences of democratic majorities." For this self-styled populist, as for the liberal "elitists" against whom he purports to argue, states and localities are forever suspect, national authority at once benign and boundless.

NOR DOES the history on offer from the new liberal constitutionalists hold up any better than their proclaimed fealty to the people. Amar's originalism earns much of its credibility from his willingness to recognize that our forebears were gun-toting, churchgoing localists who created a national government almost despite themselves. But all this dissolves quickly in the powerful alchemy he attributes to the Fourteenth Amendment. Though the states may once have been entitled to deal as they saw fit with religion, speech, jury trials, and the like, the American people supposedly changed their minds by endorsing the doctrine of "privileges or immunities." Speaking through John Bingham, they turned a Constitution of limited, federal government into one of far-reaching national rights.

But did they? Whatever Bingham himself may have had in mind, Amar can point to little evidence that his radical ideas represented anything like a consensus among Reconstruction Republicans. Still less can he demonstrate that the states which ratified the Fourteenth Amendment—the great majority of them Northern—understood themselves to be approving a massive expansion of federal interference in their affairs. Rather, as the Harvard legal scholar Raoul Berger has long maintained, the chief purpose of the privileges-or-immunities clause was to give a clear constitutional sanction to the Civil Rights Act of 1866, guaranteeing the right of blacks to make and enforce contracts, earn a living, sue, and so forth. The very notion that the clause "incorporates" the Bill of Rights did not surface in a Supreme Court opinion—and a dissenting one, at that—until 1947.

Considering Amar's eagerness to discard the older view of the Bill of Rights, it is odd, to say the least, that he and Alan Hirsch rely so exclusively on the Founding generation's principles in their own effort to coin *new* rights, including the right of homosexuals to serve in the military and of women to serve in combat. Apart from the fact that Madison was clearly opposed to any method of amendment but the one described in Article Five, or that women and homosexuals did not figure much in the 18th-century discussion of militias, it is difficult to see how the peculiar views of the Founding era could be so decisive for Amar if passage of the Fourteenth Amendment did what he says it did. Indeed, to read in succession the two recent books that bear his name is a somewhat dizzying experience, and leaves behind a strong impression of intellectual promiscuity.

As for Ackerman, his version of the broad arc of our constitutional history is no less faulty. Whatever one might say of the latitude assumed by the Federal Convention in 1787 and by Reconstruction Republicans after the Civil War, their constitutional efforts culminated in formal and explicit expressions of the people's sovereign will. They did not mistake mere democratic authority, discovered in the course of ordinary politics, for constitutional authority.

This, however, is exactly what Franklin Roosevelt did. For all the ingenuity Ackerman pours into his model of unconventional "higher lawmaking," he cannot overcome a single striking political fact that he himself reports: Roosevelt's popularity was so universal that, if he had thrown his weight behind amendment, he almost certainly could have gained the authority that he chose to extract instead through sheer political muscle. Largely as a result of that fateful decision, controversies over the Constitution since the New Deal have hinged far less on the document's words than on the fierce contest between rival schools of interpretation.

It is precisely because the New Deal and its later progeny have so ambiguous a constitutional standing that Ackerman must ultimately reject the methods by which Roosevelt achieved his "amendments." Future changes, he avers, should be spelled out in unmistakable words of fundamental law—a conclusion noteworthy for its prudence and sense of constitutional propriety but also for its breathtaking inconsistency.

WHAT, THEN, does the new turn in liberal constitutional thought amount to? One might best think of it as the constitutional equivalent of Clintonism, whose characteristic political

technique, dubbed "triangulation," has led liberals to adopt a more responsible public vocabulary indebted to the intellectual toil of conservatives. As such, it is in some respects a welcome development. For all their faults, Ackerman, Amar, and Tushnet are certainly preferable as interlocutors to unreconstructed academic activists like Laurence Tribe or Ronald Dworkin. Still, in constitutional matters as in politics, language and method are only a starting point. Far more important are the integrity with which such tools are used and the purposes for which they are taken into hand.

I have already said something about *how* the new liberal writers on the Constitution go about their work; what about their wider purposes? The first of these, of course, is to put the major achievements of liberal jurisprudence on a sounder footing, thereby shielding them from the assaults of conservatives. The essential point to be made about this endeavor—at which, as we have seen, both Ackerman and Amar fail—is that it is largely irrelevant. After all, not even the most conservative members of the current Supreme Court have any intention of, say, declaring unconstitutional the Social Security system or refusing to hear, for lack of jurisdiction, First Amendment complaints brought against localities.

This is a perfectly understandable posture, rooted in the common-sense reasoning of *stare decisis*, the principle under which the Court respects its own precedents. Difficult though it may be to find a warrant in the Constitution for the astonishing growth of the federal government's reach in this century, one thing is fairly clear: the American people have generally approved of it or, at least, have reconciled themselves to it. Even if the various rights and powers established by New Deal activists and their heirs are not constitutional in any strict sense, the courts do—and should—treat the oldest and least contested of these precedents as settled law. As James Madison finally conceded in supporting the Bank of the United States—an institution that his countrymen had long accepted but which he considered outside the federal government's enumerated powers—there was "a decreasing prospect of any change in . . . public opinion adverse to [its] constitutionality."

Where the ideas of the new liberal theorists are not irrelevant—where they stand to do real harm—is in furnishing new and more conservative-sounding rationales for *extending* the gains of liberal judicial activism. Ackerman's account of the New Deal, for instance, lends itself nicely to the federalism cases that have increasingly made their way onto the Court's docket in recent years. In the most

significant of these, *United States v. Lopez* (1995), a majority, but only a slim majority, held that the commerce clause (the ostensible constitutional source for much of the federal government's modern expansion) does not amount to *carte blanche* for any policy Congress wishes to enforce against the states. The dissenting liberals in this case were forced to assume an elaborate connection between interstate commerce and a seemingly unrelated local activity; in the future, however, thanks to the labors of Bruce Ackerman, they might simply hold that the New Deal's "amendments" already give the federal government something like plenary authority in promoting the country's general welfare.

Amar's work possesses even more potential for mischief. Much of what has been called the "rights revolution" in Supreme Court jurisprudence has proceeded under the doctrine of "substantive" due process—an oxymoron of an idea, as even its sympathizers have come to acknowledge, and one that is now all but dormant. Amar's ambitious revival of the privileges-or-immunities clause could breathe new life into liberal efforts to win judicial protection for a whole range of supposed rights. In fact, a change in course of this nature may already be under way.

In May, the Justices handed down a much-dis-

cussed ruling in *Saenz v. Roe* overturning California's limits on welfare benefits for new residents, and the privileges-or-immunities clause made an unexpected reappearance as the basis for the decision. Writing shortly thereafter in the *New Republic*, Amar found "far-reaching implications" in the Court's choice of text. For her part, Linda Greenhouse of the *New York Times*, a reliable source of liberal conventional wisdom, speculated in a piece of news analysis that the privileges-or-immunities clause might henceforth offer a "comfort zone" to "moderate Justices," allowing them to defend individual rights while at the same time "shedding the baggage of liberal methodology."

The Court's current batch of "moderate" Justices, disinclined as they have been to invoke the more controversial doctrines of judicial liberalism, may indeed be looking for new ideas. If so, their search is sure to grow more intent if the number of left-leaning Justices on the Court increases, as it almost certainly would under a new Democratic President. A few years hence we just may awake to find a Supreme Court again showing its determination to bring about profound social change—but this time under a carefully applied patina of "conservative" thinking.

OBSERVATIONS

The Prospering Fathers

Paul Johnson

THERE HAS been a serious flaw in American historical writing that is only now beginning to be corrected.

American historians have rightly celebrated the passionate moral purpose of the Pilgrim Fathers, decisive in forming the matrix of the nation's character. They have, with equal justice, canonized the Founding Fathers, that extraordinarily varied and talented group of men who, combining the best of Enlightenment values with the hard-won lessons of the English tradition of empirical statesmanship, gave the new nation a model Constitution and a splendid start toward its high-risk experiment in republican self-government. But a third key group in the country's development—the Prospering Fathers, as I call them—have never really received their due.

In the period between the end of the Civil War and the onset of World War I, this collection of en-

trepreneurial individualists, united only by their colossal energy, native shrewdness, and belief in their country's future, transformed a predominantly agricultural society into an industrial and financial superstate, laying the foundations of the nation's geopolitical supremacy and of what has rightly been called the American Century. Not only have these men failed to be canonized, they have been, to the contrary, demonized, and dismissed collectively as “robber barons.” Around their works and days there has gathered a deep encrustation of acidic mythology, advanced during their own time by “crusading”—i.e., unscrupulous—journalists and long accepted as truth by historians who might have been expected to know better.

As time marches on, however, it has become harder and harder to maintain this corrosive view. The deeds of the Prospering Fathers are now a century old, and that century, if we exclude the horrific gash of the still-inexplicable Great Depression, has been mostly a saga of wealth-creation and wealth-distribution unique in world history.

The huge increment produced by the United States made it possible to fight and win two world wars against autocracy and totalitarianism, to underwrite freedom, democracy, and the rule of law everywhere, to invest in new technologies that are now spreading at stupefying speed and, at the same time, to give the American people, who have more than doubled their numbers—as well as all those around the world who have followed the path the Prospering Fathers trod—an affluence never dreamed-of before. So whom did the barons rob?

All the more reason, then, to hail two recent and quite complementary studies: Ron Chernow's *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller** and *Morgan: American Financier* by Jean Strouse.† Neither Chernow nor Strouse is a hagiographer. Theirs are true portraits, warts and all; but together they go some way toward redressing the historical balance.

WHAT DID the Prospering Fathers have in common? By achieving

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* Reviewed by Leslie Lenkowsky in the October 1998 COMMENTARY.—ED.

† Random House, 800 pp., \$34.95.

enormous economies of scale, they turned the luxuries of the rich into the necessities of the poor, and thereby reduced the real price of almost everything. Andrew Carnegie was one exemplar of the type. Using chemists to find out what actually happened inside a steel furnace, he was able to raise production and cut costs so dramatically that steel soon replaced iron as the primary metal. The rapid and benign consequences of this feat were experienced in almost every aspect of life, from farm machinery (and productivity) to construction, making skyscrapers possible and high-quality housing cheap.

The closing of the Iron Age (as it were) and the opening of the Steel Age also cut the cost of rails and locomotives. Edward Harriman, another Prospering Father, took advantage of that fact, rationalizing the system and making it not only cheap but safe. Equally huge strides were registered in fuel costs. Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie's protégé, played a major role in the steel revolution by cutting coking bills.

But, as Ron Chernow shows, it was John D. Rockefeller who pounced on the new fuels provided by crude oil, achieving a temporary monopoly of as much as 80 percent of world production and refining. No industry in history has ever profited so much as oil refining from economies of scale, or done so much for the ordinary consumer. Right at the outset of Rockefeller's empire-building, he was able to reduce by 70 percent the cost of kerosene, the staple of housewives throughout the nation. Even more important in the long run was the competition that cheap oil offered to solid fuel in the generation of electricity. The electrical age began in earnest around 1900, rapidly making California the richest state in the union and in time transforming the Far West into one of the world's most efficient industrial zones.

Cheap petroleum contributed still more to the automobile revolu-

tion, a revolution introduced by the last of the Prospering Fathers, Henry Ford. Thanks to vertiginous economies of scale, the sturdy, reliable, safely driven, and easily maintained car created by Ford soon became cheap, too. By putting the automobile within the means not only of most farmers but of the workers who produced it, Rockefeller and Ford ended the isolation of the farming families who made up half the nation and set industrial workers on the road to comfort and even affluence.

THE METHODS employed by men like Rockefeller to achieve their temporary monopolies were ruthless—and they were resented. As Chernow faithfully reports, Rockefeller was none too gentle in putting inefficient producers out of business. One of his victims was the father of Ida Tarbell, the first “investigative journalist,” and she took her revenge by spending most of her life exposing and denouncing the excesses of Standard Oil. In an image that persists, she branded Rockefeller a monster.

The hostile journalists soon stirred up the politicians, among them old-money grandees like Theodore Roosevelt, who, taking a particular objection to Edward Harriman, denounced him as a “malefactor.” Thus was detonated a populist revolution that fed off a sore spot in the American character, the conflict between bigness and democracy. Loving the advantages of bigness, Americans have also always wanted the voices of the “people” to be heard above its uproar. Rockefeller's quest for a large-scale oil industry genuinely scared a lot of Americans, not all of whom, like Tarbell, were *parti pris*.

In 1879, a grand jury in Pennsylvania indicted Rockefeller for conspiracy and extortion. For 30 years, he became, in strict law, a fugitive from justice, and had to be extremely careful to avoid extradition from the states where he lived, made his

money, or enjoyed himself. If he built and sustained an empire, and became the richest man in the world, he did so against a constant campaign of political and legal opposition, much of it bitter and highly personal. I would guess that more legal actions were taken, and (later on) more corrective laws passed, against him than against any other man in history. That, of course, is one reason why his business crimes, real or imaginary, have been brought so thoroughly to light. Chernow goes into them with energy.

Suspiciousness of bigness was not confined to “little people.” It also loomed large in the demonology of intellectuals, not least in the legal profession. When chain stores were created by the disciples of the Prospering Fathers, pushing smaller and less efficient competitors to the wall while driving down retail costs, progressive legal minds challenged the idea that large-scale enterprises would benefit ordinary families. Their view was given for all time by Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis, who was speaking with both the chain stores and Standard Oil in mind:

I have considered and do consider that the proposition that mere bigness cannot be an offense against society is false, because I believe that our society, which rests upon democracy, cannot endure under such conditions.

This was not so much an argument, however, as an article of political faith, and one more likely to be held by a well-paid judge than by a working-class housewife on a tight budget. But Brandeis's doctrine did and no doubt still does find favor among lawyers and professors. Rockefeller was the first major victim of the antitrust legislation to which this doctrine gave birth: Standard Oil, in its pristine form, was broken up.

Of course, the legal progressives were never able to defeat outright the Prospering Fathers and their

disciples and descendants, for another forensic groundwork had been laid down early in the 19th century by the first great Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, John Marshall. His rulings, which made large-scale capitalist enterprise in the U.S. not only possible but profitable, were graven in granite. What the progressives *were* able to do was to put big business perpetually on its guard, to force it to watch its step, to calculate legal consequences at every stage, and to muster the resources to fight court battles as part of routine operations. Over the decades, all this has proved mightily beneficial to the legal profession; since the costs have naturally been written into retail prices, whether consumers have benefited is another question altogether.

A classic instance today of this continuing trench warfare is the Microsoft case. In the last quarter-century, Bill Gates, a latter-day Prospering Father, has built up from nothing the largest company in the world, right at the forefront of technology (as were Carnegie Steel and Ford Motors and Standard Oil in their day) and with a total value equal to the gross national product of a medium-sized country like Turkey. The cost of communicating information is falling steeply and continuously, and there can be no doubt that Gates has had a great deal to do with that fact.

Since communications are at the heart of the present industrial revolution, all of us are the beneficiaries of Bill Gates's ingenuity and of the economies of scale he has pioneered. At the same time, his bigness has made him target number one for federal lawyers. So the battle continues, and will continue, until the end of time or at least until the end of the union.

IN RON CHERNOW's hands, John D. Rockefeller emerges as a complicated human being, one who mixed low cunning and sharp practice with high purposes, even ideal-

ism, and who certainly saw himself as a public benefactor unjustly assailed by pygmies. In those respects and others, he bears a certain resemblance to other Prospering Fathers. Yet, like the Pilgrims and Founders before them, these men were hardly all of one type. In addition to Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford—and in contrast to them—was J. Pierpont Morgan.

Morgan was not new money but old—third-generation. He was not an industrialist but a banker. He did not create new products, he financed them. He assembled empires, but they were takeovers, not conquests by a dynamic engine of his own making.

There was an even more important difference: a difference of temperament or one might even say of philosophy. The others took a naturalistic view of competition and believed in the survival of the fittest. They pushed individualism almost to extremes. By contrast, Morgan strove for the health of business society as a whole; he saw the need for the protection of endangered economic species, and took steps to preserve the capitalist environment in which all could flourish.

I am not saying Morgan was a corporatist—far from it. He believed in competition and practiced it. But, in an enlightened society like America, he saw the business community as a moral entity, governed by laws that may not necessarily have been written down in the form of statutes. He was a conciliator, a mediator, an arbiter of rougher, greedier spirits.

Though keen on money, Morgan was also not avid for it—a difference in temperament reflected in his net assets. Unlike Carnegie, who at one time held nearly a half-billion dollars in cash, or billionaires like Rockefeller and Ford, Morgan died in 1913 leaving \$80 million, and some of his art collection had to be sold to meet the provisions in his will. Thus, Rockefeller's surprised observation: "Why, just think of

that—Mr. Morgan was not even a wealthy man!"

NEEDLESS TO say, these distinctions between Morgan and the other Prospering Fathers were ignored by the public. Like the rest, he was classified as a robber baron and abused accordingly (perhaps most famously in our own day by the novelist E.L. Doctorow in *Ragtime*). But in *Morgan: American Financier*, the literary biographer Jean Strouse, who has made extensive use of hitherto unpublished papers from archives on both sides of the Atlantic, performs a notable demolition job on this mythology.

A chief target of her research is the fantastic invention that Morgan provoked the financial panic of 1907. Anyone in business knows that bankers, especially successful ones like Morgan, never provoke panics. On the contrary: they seek order at all times. And Morgan was exemplary in this respect. The Bank of the United States had been abolished by President Jackson, and nothing like it existed again until Woodrow Wilson created the Federal Reserve System in 1913. In the meantime, business prospered thanks largely to irenicists like Morgan. If the public did not appreciate the difference between him and the others, Wall Street did; and that was the source of his authority.

During the panic of 1907, potentially a very serious one, Morgan returned to New York and, over the next 24 hours, in the vast room that now forms the core of the splendid Morgan Library, he sorted out the unsavable businesses from the sound majority, arranging 10-percent loans for all the healthy firms in trouble. As news of his doings got out, the panic subsided. In short, Morgan carried out the role of the chairman of a central bank—a chairman of exceptional quality. He did so not by virtue of institutional powers, but solely on the basis of the trust he personally inspired. There has been no parallel performance in business history.

The reason Morgan was able to pull Wall Street out of the abyss in 1907 emerged a few years later when he gave evidence to the Pujo committee, a congressional inquiry into the so-called "money trust." Morgan's perennial weakness was self-presentation. As a rule he was inarticulate, particularly concerning things he cared deeply about and had pondered the longest. Samuel Untermyer, the slick committee attorney, persisted in questioning Morgan about the way he did business, and finally the old man managed to get something important out. Strouse gives us large chunks of the exchange.

When he made decisions, Morgan explained to Untermyer, he often did so not in order to enrich himself but because "I thought it was the thing to do." In other words, his reasons, at least in the short term, could be moral rather than commercial, although in the long term this meant they were commercial, too: a system in which moral principles had weight would inspire confidence and therefore function more efficiently.

Morgan, however, lacked the words to say all this plainly and fully to the exasperated Untermyer. Instead, he just stuck to his formula: "it was the thing to do."

Untermyer: That does not explain anything.

Morgan: That is the only reason I can give.

Untermyer: It was the thing to do for whom?

Morgan: That is the only reason I can give. That is the only reason I have, in other words. I am not trying to keep anything back, you understand.

Untermyer: I understand. In other words, you have no reason at all.

Morgan: That is the way you look at it. I think it is a very good reason. One of these days you will agree with me.

Untermyer insisted that business was about money or it was about nothing. New York banks, he suggested, lent money to those men or institutions that already "have the money back of them." But Morgan corrected him: "No sir, it is because people believe in the man."

Untermyer: And he might not be worth anything?

Morgan: . . . I have known a man to come into my office, and I have given him a check for a million dollars when I knew [he] had not a cent in the world.

Untermyer: Is not commercial credit based primarily upon money or property?

Morgan: No sir; the first thing is character.

Untermyer: Before money or property?

Morgan: Before money or property or anything else. Money cannot buy it, . . . because a man I do not trust would not get money out of me on all the bonds in Christendom.

THIS, THEN, was the moral element that, in varying degrees, characterized the approach to business of the Prospering Fathers. And, as both Chernow and Strouse show, there was a corollary to it: they gave away the fortunes they had amassed. Carnegie enunciated the relevant principle in his essay *On Wealth*. While it was morally acceptable, he wrote, for a man to become rich, it was wicked for him to hang on to his wealth: "The man who thus dies rich dies disgraced."

Carnegie practiced what he preached. By the time he died, in his

sleep, in his 84th year, he had disposed of practically everything he possessed. In 1919, the Carnegie Endowment published *A Manual of the Public Benefactions of Andrew Carnegie*; already, by then, over \$350 million (more than \$3 billion in current dollars) had been spent on a huge variety of projects, including 2,811 public libraries and 7,689 church organs.

Rockefeller's benefactions were on a similar scale. They began in the 1870's and expanded gradually under his almoner, Frederick Gates, who once said to Rockefeller that, unless he gave most of his money away, "it will crush you, and your children, and your children's children." Rockefeller took the advice: his gifts were made systematic, efficient, and permanent, and continue to this day. It was the same with Ford.

Not all of this entrepreneurial money has been spent in ways the Prospering Fathers would have approved. Some, in fact, has gone to movements and individuals that seek not to increase but to undermine American prosperity.* Yet it is hard to imagine America today without these munificent benefactions, which include both the Morgan Library and the Frick museum—my favorite library and my favorite art collection in the whole world. Indeed, traveling around America, and seeing the results of the generosity of the Prospering Fathers and their countless followers, I am led to conclude that unrestricted capitalism plus unlimited philanthropy is a far better way of redistributing wealth than any compulsory system that any government, no matter how enlightened, could ever devise.

* For more on this point, see Chester E. Finn, Jr., "Giving It Away: An Open Letter to Bill Gates," in the January 1998 COMMENTARY. — ED.

Sex, Death, and Picasso

Steven C. Munson

“I PAINT with my prick,” said Pierre Auguste Renoir. Who, having seen *Nude in Sunlight* (1876) or *Sleeping Woman* (1897), could doubt it?

Like Henri Matisse, however, another painter whose erotic impulses had a powerful effect on his art, Renoir was basically a family man. Pablo Picasso was not. “If you feel like fucking, fuck!” was his motto, and, according to John Richardson, his leading biographer, he acted on it without hesitation.* As a young man, Picasso spent “endless hours,” in Richardson’s phrase, in the whorehouses of Barcelona. Before, during, and between his two marriages, he had numerous affairs, girlfriends, and mistresses. For him, constant sexual gratification seemed an urgent necessity, and, as Richardson reports, in some sense Picasso identified the “procreative act” with his art.

This would not come as a surprise to anyone who had a chance

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to see the recent exhibit of the artist’s ceramic works at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.† The more than 200 pieces, covering a period from the late 1940’s through the mid-1960’s, constituted a prolific display of the kind of virtuosity, rooted in his extraordinary ability to draw, for which Picasso has long been recognized. And in their reprise of several of his most familiar motifs, among them the bullfight and the bacchanal, a number of these works also conveyed the impression of being “relics” of the Picasso era itself. But certainly the predominant theme of the show was Picasso’s erotic sensibility.

Many of these painted pots, jugs, figures, tiles, plates, and other objects are palpably infused both with the tactile sensations of molding and shaping that were involved in their creation and with the innocence of sexual abandon. Thus, the painted plate *Faun and Cymbals* (1957) shows the grinning creature squatting and holding up the musical instruments while sporting a large erection. *Priapus* (1964), a white jug designed to represent a fat man, has a “spout” so swollen that it appears to have

forced the man’s clasped hands (the jug’s handle) and head backward for balance. In *Head* (1948), this same spout-form reappears in a flaccid state, folded over itself to create the eyes and elongated nose. And still another version of the form is used for the bird’s mouth, head, and neck in *Hands Grasping a Bird* (1950-51).

Another common motif was that of a jug in the shape of a woman. It appeared in many forms, including the whimsical *Bikini* (1961), the very first object one saw in entering the exhibit, and the breathtaking *Bacchanal* (1950). The beautiful series of blue, black, and white Tanagra figures and the touching *Seated Nude Combing Her Hair*, made up of 25 painted tiles, likewise confirmed the overall impression of gentleness, sensuality, and depth of feeling, recalling such early paintings as *Girl With a Pitcher*, *Nude With Clasped*

* Two volumes of Richardson’s work-in-progress have so far appeared: *A Life of Picasso: 1881-1906* (Random House, 1991) and *A Life of Picasso: 1907-1917* (Random House, 1996).

† “Picasso: Painter and Sculptor in Clay” ran from March 3 to June 6, 1999. It had appeared from September 17 to December 16, 1998 at the Royal Academy of Arts in London.

Hands (Fernande), and *The Harem*, all from 1906.

No less affecting than the works themselves was the sense of resolution in the air. Walking through the exhibition rooms, one got the feeling that, in surrendering himself so completely to the requirements and possibilities of a medium that up until the postwar years he had not fully explored, Picasso had come to terms in a fairly satisfying way both with the *joie de vivre* embodied in the art of his longtime "rival," Henri Matisse, and with the limits of his own mature artistry.

BUT IF the Met show was a delight to the eye and a lift to the spirit, another Picasso exhibit running at about the same time at New York's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum could hardly be said to have afforded nearly so pleasurable an experience.* Explicitly presented as a selection of the "political" art Picasso produced from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War to the end of World War II, this show, mostly of paintings, seemed to have little in common with the Met's postwar exhibit beyond the fact that the works in both came from the same hand. But, as it turned out, the Guggenheim show also bore directly—and more profoundly—on the question of Picasso's attitude toward women and its connection to his art. For that reason, it helped to illuminate the peculiar nature of the aesthetic struggle the artist found himself engaged in after he had already achieved worldwide renown in the preceding two decades.

That struggle had its ultimate origins in Málaga, in southern Spain, where Picasso, the son of a downwardly mobile painter and art teacher, was born in 1881. Since he was the first male heir on either side of the family, his arrival was greeted, according to Richardson, as though he were "the Messiah," and he seems to have been raised in accordance with that same spirit.

As a boy, Picasso began drawing

and never stopped; he also made paper cutouts for his mother and his little sister Conchita. At the age of ten, he was doing his first oil paintings, including one of a picador (the theme of the bull and the bullfight would remain a significant part of his art until the end of his life). By the time he was a teenager, his gifts and skill were apparent, and he was sent for traditional academic training to the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona. He soon overtook his father as a draftsman and painter and, as Richardson writes, was on his way to becoming a kind of conqueror:

By dint of charisma and charm, Picasso had no difficulty in disarming and enslaving (and sometimes destroying) one not very gifted man after another: Pallares, Sabartes, Casagemas, his son Paulo, and a host of minor figures. . . . Picasso's tyranny was all the more effective for being tacit. He never forced anyone to sacrifice a wife, mistress, or career. They were the ones who insisted on doing so.

Carles Casagemas and Emanuel Pallares were two of Picasso's closest friends, and Jaime Sabartes would eventually become his longtime secretary. Casagemas, Pallares, and Picasso—together with their girlfriends—shared a large studio during their first stay in Paris, where Picasso would eventually take up permanent residence. According to Richardson, Casagemas, unlike his "priapic" hero, was unable to perform sexually and as a result

started to go to pieces and took more than ever to drink. His companions were too busy working or enjoying themselves to spare time for his problems. Casagemas may have been footing many of the bills, . . . but Picasso had decided that . . . his one and only obligation was to himself. Nor would he ever change in this respect.

In Richardson's view, this "obses-

sive concern with self-preservation was one of [Picasso's] most consistent characteristics." This, indeed, is what explains the painter's careful avoidance of any serious political entanglements, such as with the anarchists of his youth. As Richardson writes, Picasso never laid claim "to any political commitment prior to his espousal of the leftist cause at the time of the Spanish Civil War, beyond professing a lifelong sympathy with the downtrodden, the victims of war or tyranny or want."

THIS BACKGROUND provides a context for understanding Picasso's decision in 1937 to take a very public stand against Franco. According to the curators of the Guggenheim show, it was at this point that Picasso and his art suddenly became radicalized. Yet everything we know of his conduct and his character—brilliantly limned by Richardson—suggests that when he finally did embrace the cause of Spanish Republicanism, he did so less out of political conviction than out of that same obsession with "self-preservation" that motivated him throughout his life.

For one thing, becoming an anti-fascist entailed no real sacrifice on his part; already wealthy, he could afford to give money or donate pictures, as he indeed did, for the benefit of Spanish war victims. Moreover, as Michael FitzGerald's illuminating catalogue essay for the Guggenheim show makes clear, joining the anti-Franco bandwagon was a public-relations boon for the painter. It not only made him even more famous than he already was—if now as a great humanitarian as well as a great artist—it also made *Guernica* one of the most famous paintings in the world.

That picture, said to be inspired by Paris newspaper accounts of the

* "Picasso and the War Years: 1937-1945" ran from February 5 to April 26, 1999. It had appeared at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) from October 10, 1998 to January 3, 1999.

bombing of the Spanish town by Franco's German allies, was not at the Guggenheim; but a number of preliminary works, both drawings and paintings, were. One of these, the stunning black, gray, and white oil *Study for Guernica (Head of a Horse)* (1937), has become one of the most recognizable of the many well-known images from the final painting.

But this was not the first time this image had appeared in Picasso's work. As Giorgio Cortenova points out in his 1991 study, *The Works of Picasso*, in *Bullfight* (1934), painted two years before the outbreak of war in Spain, "the horse's head and neck seem to be a sort of pictorial premonition of *Guernica*." Even more telling is the highly stylized and colorful crayon, gouache, and collage *Study for Guernica (Mother and Dead Child)* (1937), one of the most beautiful—and most interesting—pictures in the entire exhibit. Measuring only about 9 x 11 inches, it shows a kneeling mother holding her dead child in one arm and reaching heavenward with the other, with flames shooting from a building behind her. The child appears to have been pierced through by a phallus-like spear with a broken shaft, an image that appears in other paintings in the show.

If one did not know what occasioned *Study for Guernica (Mother and Dead Child)*, one would not think there was anything particularly political, or even historical, about it. Only the woman's exposed breast, designed to look like an aerial bomb, indicates modern warfare. What this picture actually puts one in mind of is *Massacre of the Innocents*, an ink drawing by Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665).

There is, however, an important difference in the emotional impact of the two works: the Poussin drawing conveys, and powerfully so, a sense of the horror of human slaughter; Picasso's does not. The problem with interpreting it simply as a picture about the carnage in civil-war Spain, or even as an evo-

cation of the horrors of war in general—which is the view that those who insist on the work's political character ultimately fall back on—is that what is irresistibly compelling about the work is the lovingness with which Picasso has depicted the dead child. In this small drawing he brings the dead, so to speak, to life; it is this achievement that gives the picture its uncanny power, a power that *Guernica* as a whole dissipates.

THE SOURCE of that power will probably remain a mystery. But it almost certainly lies deeper than the admittedly political events that occasioned the work, deeper even than the inspiration provided by other great works of art. As a teenager, Picasso had been profoundly affected by the death from diphtheria of his sister Conchita, whom he adored. While she languished, he even made a vow to God that, if she were spared, he would give up painting. The fact that he connected her mortality to his art, and, according to Richardson, continued to feel remorse and guilt a half-century after her death, suggests that *Study for Guernica (Mother and Dead Child)*—and perhaps even *Guernica* itself—was as much an attempt to come to terms with some inner torment as it was an effort to depict the torment of his war-ravaged homeland, which he had long since left behind.

If this raises questions about the meaning of *Guernica*, Picasso's most identifiable "political" painting, what about the pictures he made during World War II, which made up the bulk of the Guggenheim exhibit? Here is what the artist himself had to say about them:

I have not painted the war because I am not the kind of painter who goes out like a photographer for something to depict. But I have no doubt that the war is in these paintings I have done. Later on perhaps the historians will find them and show that my style has changed under the war's influence. Myself, I do not know.

Picasso made this statement to an American war correspondent shortly after the liberation of Paris in 1944. It is typically ambiguous and perhaps somewhat disingenuous. For in addition to being an artistic genius, Picasso was also a genius at manipulating people, particularly in regard to reactions to his work. To cite just one example: his primitivistic masterpiece, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, now in New York's Museum of Modern Art, was painted in 1907, but Picasso did not exhibit it publicly until 1916, well after its shock value might have hurt his reputation.

The care he took in cultivating that reputation was probably surpassed only by the care he took in making pictures, which may be one reason why this extraordinarily innovative and competitive artist encouraged the view that his wartime art was rooted in his concern over the international situation. Once again, however, the pictures themselves tell a different, and more complicated, story.

ONE REVIEWER of the Guggenheim show, writing in the *New York Times*, made the point that much of the art on display seemed "familiar" (which seems also to have been the initial critical judgment rendered in 1945, when Picasso's wartime work was first publicly exhibited). Indeed, the continuities with works of the prewar period suggest that during the war years, Picasso found himself contending—though perhaps with less success than before—with the same kind of personal and aesthetic forces that had always driven his art. There were signs of such a struggle throughout the Guggenheim show, not least in the dearth of pictures that one would unhesitatingly describe as great, especially in comparison with the painter's earlier work.

To be sure, there were several remarkable canvases, including the very first picture one encountered as one started up the museum's cir-

cular ramp, *Girl Asleep at a Table* (1936). Painted mostly in tones of gray, with areas of black and white and touches of rose showing through or left uncovered, this picture displays Picasso's simplified post-Cubist facture of straight and curved lines and twisted planes. The delicacy and tenderness of the girl's head—a pointy-ended oval with little more than squiggles for eyes, nose, and mouth—echo his rendering of his mistress Marie-Thérèse Walter asleep in a chair in *The Dream* (1932), though without the latter's color and playfulness. The girl's face is a focal point of quiet in a picture that almost swirls with line and form; the monochrome coloring reinforces the effect of austere beauty.

Another austere though more colorful picture was *Reclining Nude and Woman Washing Her Feet* (1944). An even more simplified composition than *Girl Asleep at a Table*, it is drawn with Picasso's characteristic authority, fluidity, and use of multiple perspectives. And again the picture recalls an earlier work, with the posture of the sleeping figure being taken directly from a painting done twelve years earlier, *The Sleeper* (1932).

Reclining Nude and Woman Washing Her Feet exudes a subdued eroticism that was virtually absent from the rest of the show. As if to point up the contrast, it was followed by a graphite drawing, *Woman Washing Her Foot* (1944), that turns the dejected-looking gray figure of the preceding work into a grinning, devouring monster. It was this drawing, as much as anything else, that set the overall tone of the exhibit, whose unstated theme seemed to be not Picasso's response to the war with Franco or Hitler but his response to a conflict within himself, a conflict expressed in terms of rather disturbing representations of women.

As JOHN RICHARDSON points out, Picasso's attitude toward women had always been both tender and predatory, and many of the works at

the Guggenheim belonged decidedly in the latter category. Although one of the most evocative, the oddly sculptural *Woman With a Green Hat* (1939), is an extraordinarily sensitive portrait of Picasso's mistress, the troubled Dora Maar, in several other works her lost look is transformed through pictorial distortions into something alternately fearful and terrifying. The primary and recurrent distortion is a bifurcation of the face and head that creates a snout-like image—an image recalling the two savagely animalistic prostitutes presented in *Les Femmes d'Alger*.

Picasso's dehumanization of women—in both his life and his art—has, of course, been the subject of considerable scrutiny; he once said that women were “machines for suffering,” a phrase that can be interpreted variously to mean that they cause suffering, deserve to suffer, or deserve sympathy. His ability to represent the less consoling side of this idea was strikingly in evidence in *Weeping Woman With a Handkerchief* (1937). What was most impressive, however, were the pictures of heads of women and seated women, two series that together comprised the largest number of paintings in the show.

In the gray, loosely painted *Bust of a Woman* (1941), the figure is depicted as a metallic “warlike” machine. In *Woman Seated in an Armchair* (1941), the panic-stricken left side of the divided face bears an eerie resemblance to one of Picasso's last self-portraits, a blue crayon drawing done in 1972; the jagged side of one white-gloved hand—indeed, the entire composition of thick jutting lines and sharp-edged triangular forms—conveys a sense of repressed violence. Even in another painting called *Woman in an Armchair*, also done in 1941 but more brightly colored and far less menacing, the figure's eyebrows are represented by two large nails.

In looking at these pictures and others like them, it was difficult to

ignore the obvious thought that they involved some sort of projection by Picasso of his own intense anxiety (and rage) onto his female “subjects.” In a fascinating catalogue essay, Brigitte Baer argues that the fundamental traumatic event behind much of Picasso's wartime output—in particular, the paintings of women—was not the cataclysm of World War II but the death of the artist's mother, which occurred in early 1939. But there may have been still other causes of the seemingly unmitigated despair that ran like an undercurrent through the works at the Guggenheim.

Picasso once said: “Cézanne's anxiety is what interests us. That is his lesson.” In elucidating what he meant by this statement, John Richardson writes:

This anxiety is what compels an artist to set his sights ever higher so that each new brushstroke constitutes a little victory snatched from the maw of defeat. The greater an artist's ability, Picasso used to say, the more fiercely he has to combat facility and virtuosity by making things as difficult as possible for himself—without, of course, letting it look difficult.

Here, then, is the question: had Picasso, by the late 1930's and early 1940's, begun to feel that he could no longer pursue this struggle with the same kind of ambitious expectations he had once counted on? One aspect of his greatness as a painter had always been his protean character—his extraordinary capacity to absorb and digest an amazing variety of aesthetic influences, exploit their logic with breathtaking speed, and in the process produce utterly original works of art. A collector of Picasso's Cubist paintings once said he had been overwhelmed by their “concentrated force,” a quality he had previously encountered only in Cézanne. He was referring, in part, to the experience one has in looking at certain Cézanne still lifes of a visual tension so

powerful that the aesthetic reality—images of fruit, table, bowl, and tablecloth—comes to seem more real than the actual objects that inspired it.

Such was Picasso's goal as well, and to the degree that he achieved it, it made his best work rivetingly beautiful. In contrast, more than a few of the works at the Guggenheim seemed constrained. Had Picasso, when he was creating these pictures, begun to feel that his mastery was slipping away? Was the suggestion of death in such works as *Still Life With Candle, Palette, and Black Bull's Head* (1938) and the luminous *Still Life With Sheep's Skull and Table* (1942) a reflection of the war, or of emotions centered on the artist's recognition of his own mortality?

PERHAPS THOSE who strain to see throughout Picasso's wartime work direct and sometimes rather pat correlations between events in occupied Paris and various "symbolic" pictorial elements do so because they also recognize precisely such symptoms of artistic crisis. But why strain in the first place? The fact that Picasso himself permitted his art to be used for political purposes—and that he

even created explicitly political works, especially after he joined the Communist party in 1944—does not, in and of itself, count for much in this regard. For in truth such works are largely if not entirely artistic failures. One need only look at *Monument to the Spanish Who Died for France* (1945-47) or *Cock of the Liberation* (1944), both in the Guggenheim show, to see the kind of lightweight and sentimental picture it is hard to believe Picasso himself could have taken all that seriously.

Whether he painted such pictures out of conviction, or out of a desire to burnish his standing as a cultural figure—this was France, after all, where Communism as an intellectual position would not be discredited until the mid-1970's—is beside the point. Whatever his motives, he clearly no longer felt as secure as he once did in presenting his art on purely aesthetic grounds. It may indeed have been a sense of painterly insecurity that accounts for the strange and oppressive quality of irresolution—so unlike the confident spirit of the pottery exhibit at the Met—that pervaded many of the pictures in the Guggenheim show. And that in turn

may have had something to do with why those responsible for the exhibit felt the need to offer an extra-artistic justification both for the works themselves and for the act of displaying them.

The preface to the Guggenheim exhibit catalogue states that Picasso's wartime works provide "messages of timely relevance, given a renewed interest in the history of World War II and Nazi cultural policies, augmented by the efforts of contemporary artists to address political and social realities." Attempting to make Picasso "relevant" is silly enough; but using him to legitimize the politicized—and highly dubious—art of our own day is a far more serious matter, involving as it does an effort to reduce the art of the past in order to uphold the absence of genuine critical standards today. Viewing Picasso's pictures from such an angle can only lead to distortion both of their meaning and of their value. To do him—one of the two greatest artists of the 20th century—this kind of injustice is neither a service to Picasso nor a help to anyone seeking a deeper understanding of his art.

MUSIC

Opera USA

Terry Teachout

WHAT, IF anything, will music lovers remember a decade from now about American opera in the last year of this century? One possibility is that 1998-99 will be recalled as the season American opera finally came into its own. Among other noteworthy events were these:

- The Metropolitan Opera presented the long-delayed company premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Susan-nah* (1955), starring the world-renowned American soprano Renée Fleming.

- Fleming and Dawn Upshaw, another much-admired American soprano, released a pair of critically-acclaimed recital albums devoted to scenes and arias from American operas.*

- New York City Opera revived Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* (1970) and Jack Beeson's *Lizzie Borden* (1965), and telecast the latter over PBS.

- Milwaukee's Florentine Opera gave the U.S. premiere of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, a first opera by the new-tonalist composer Lowell Liebermann.

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- San Francisco Opera opened its season with the world premiere of André Previn's operatic version of the Tennessee Williams play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

- Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul* (1950), having previously been unavailable on records for more than three decades, was finally recorded—not once, but twice.

Nor does the season just past appear to be a fluke. In the 1999-2000 season, for example, the Metropolitan Opera will offer the world premiere of John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* and New York City Opera will present Virgil Thomson's *The Mother of Us All* (1947), while other premieres and revivals of comparable interest are scheduled to take place around the country.

But is American opera really as vital as it now looks? Thereby hangs a tale.

AMERICAN OPERA is not the same thing as opera in America. By the mid-19th century, operas were being produced more or less regularly in most of the bigger cities in the U.S., and the opening of New York's Metropolitan Opera House

in 1883 gave this country its first permanent company of international stature. But for a long time, opera remained an alien graft, marketed as a luxury item for well-to-do audiences; every important house featured foreign singers and conductors, was run by a foreign director, and performed foreign operas all but exclusively.

Not until the tenure of Giulio Gatti-Casazza, the Met's director from 1908 to 1935, did the company make a sustained attempt to commission and produce grand operas by American composers. But most of the composers it approached, including such forgotten figures as Richard Hageman, Horatio Parker, John Seymour, and Deems Taylor, were academic conservatives whose music was determinedly pre-modern in style, and none of their efforts entered the company's repertoire. Only one of the American operas presented by the Met, Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount* (1934), proved to be of more than passing interest; even so,

* Further information about these CDs, along with recordings of other operas mentioned in this piece, can be found in the accompanying discography.

and despite an exceptional opening-night success—the cast, which included Lawrence Tibbett, the first world-class male opera singer to have been born and trained in the U.S., took 50 curtain calls—it was never revived by the Met or produced by any other major house, and has yet to be recorded in its entirety.

This is not to say that American composers, or significant American operas, were in short supply, only that they had to look elsewhere. The three most important premieres of the 30's all took place in nonoperatic venues. Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) was produced at Connecticut's Wadsworth Atheneum, one of the oldest art museums in the U.S., and later moved to Broadway for a limited run; George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935) and Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1938) both opened on Broadway. Significantly, none of these works was conventional in style or form. *Four Saints* is a Dada-influenced mystery play set to a nonsense libretto by Gertrude Stein; *Porgy and Bess* is half-opera, half-musical comedy; and *The Cradle Will Rock* is a left-wing agitprop musical modeled after the Brecht-Weill *The Three-Penny Opera*.

These works, though they failed to enter the repertoire of major houses—*Porgy and Bess*, by far the most successful of the three, was not produced by the Met until 1985, a half-century after its premiere—still had a powerful effect on American composers of the 40's and after. Having arrived at the logical conclusion that the opera establishment of their native land was uninterested in modernism, most of all a modernism made in America, they turned their backs on the grand-opera idiom and chose another path.

THAT PATH lay through the American musical, then approaching the peak of its artistic vitality. In shows designed specifically for performance in small-sized Broadway the-

aters, a number of classical composers in the 40's began to pay close attention to the musical's characteristic idioms. Among them was Leonard Bernstein, whose *On the Town* (book and lyrics by Betty Comden and Adolph Green) opened in 1944. There was also Kurt Weill, who emigrated to America in 1935 and subsequently wrote such successful Broadway musicals as *Lady in the Dark* (1941) and *Street Scene* (1947). And there was the English composer Benjamin Britten, then living in the U.S., who collaborated with the poet W. H. Auden on *Paul Bunyan* (1941), an operetta strongly influenced by Gershwin and Cole Porter. Though initially unsuccessful (it has since become popular), *Paul Bunyan* pointed toward a new approach to American opera, modeled not after such neoromantic costume pieces as *Merry Mount* but along the modernist lines previously suggested by Blitzstein, Gershwin, and Thomson.

The first American composer to write true operas for theater-sized houses was Gian Carlo Menotti. An Italian émigré who studied at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute, Menotti composed three works—*The Medium* (1946), *The Consul*, and *The Saint of Bleeker Street* (1954)—that were commercially produced on Broadway at a time when American opera houses were closed to operas by American composers.

The Consul, which ran for 269 performances on Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize, exemplifies Menotti's approach. Written, like all of his stage works, to the composer's own English-language libretto, it is a taut, concise melodrama set in "the present" in a totalitarian state somewhere in Europe. The music, often dissonant but always unequivocally tonal, is crisply and sparsely scored for a piano-dominated pit orchestra. "I rather like the sparseness," Menotti has said, "which allows the text to be understood."

As it happens, many listeners over the years have found the text

of *The Consul* to be more memorable than its score. According to the critic B.H. Haggin, for example, so powerfully does Menotti's libretto engage the interest that an audience may be tempted to ascribe "to the trashy music the impressive qualities it is being moved by in the dramatic idea." To this criticism, Menotti has replied that his words and music are all of a piece:

Let anyone read one of my texts divorced from its musical setting to discover the truth of what I say. My operas are either good or bad; but if their librettos seem alive or powerful in performance, then the music must share this distinction.

The truth lies somewhere in between. Like most of Menotti's operas, *The Consul* is text-driven, at times resembling a stage play with atmospheric background music rather than an opera; only at key moments, most notably the climactic aria, "To this we've come," does he allow his plain, functional vocal lines to flower into Puccini-like melody. But this is a deliberate choice rather than an incapacity, and in Menotti's best operas, the results invariably justify themselves in performance. Both *The Consul* and *The Medium* are in this respect similar to such "well-made" commercial plays of the 30's and 40's as Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes*: whatever their seeming inadequacies when considered solely as pure music, they are unfailingly effective on stage.

MENOTTI'S COMMERCIAL success had no immediate effect on the artistic policies of American grand-opera companies, which remained stolidly indifferent to new operas of any kind. Under Rudolf Bing, the Met's general manager from 1950 to 1972, the company premiered just three new works, all of which were dropped after a season or two. This continuing indifference forced yet another generation of composers to look elsewhere.

Numerous operas by American composers were written in the 50's and 60's, and many received their premieres at New York City Opera—a company which, unlike the Met, was committed as a matter of policy to the promotion of American work, and which then occupied much smaller quarters than in its present incarnation as part of the Lincoln Center complex. Unlike Menotti's operas, these tended to be explicitly American in both tone and theme. Some, like Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* (1954), Floyd's *Susannah*, and Douglas Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1956), were composed in styles deriving in part from American folksong and popular music, while others, including Beeson's *Lizzie Borden* (1965) and Floyd's *Of Mice and Men* (1970), were cast in a somewhat more modern idiom.

In other ways, though, many of these operas were clearly influenced by Menotti. For one thing, American opera composers of the 50's and 60's were just as firmly committed as Menotti to the language of functional tonality. And for another thing, theirs were text-driven works with "well-made" librettos (Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*, premiered by the Met in 1958, actually had a libretto by Menotti himself). Though some were more musically memorable than others, most have proved to be highly effective theater pieces.*

Ironically, this selfsame combination of qualities worked in circular fashion to ensure the continued exclusion of American opera, on the one hand from serious critical attention and on the other hand from the major houses. The work of the 50's and 60's composers was savaged by a later generation of critics who regarded tonality as passé—and who also had no use for the aesthetic of accessibility that long dominated modern American classical music. Typical of this point of view is the article on Carlisle Floyd in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (1992), whose tone of objectivity barely conceals the author's

contempt for Floyd's tradition-based musical values.

At the same time, a more practical obstacle to the success of these works in the world of grand opera was their deliberately restrained proportions. Most of the American operas that followed *The Consul* were intended, like it, for performance in small- and medium-sized houses. The orchestras are modest in size, the scenic requirements comfortably naturalistic. They were thus well-suited to the needs of regional companies and college music departments looking for new English-language operas that were not beyond their limited technical and financial means. But they could not be produced without distortion on the greatly expanded scale demanded by, say, the 3,800-seat Metropolitan Opera House.

This circumstance continues to bedevil the major-house careers of operas from those years, as the Met's recent production of *Susannah* made uncomfortably clear. Floyd's homespun tale of sexual temptation in a Tennessee mountain village is simply too small in visual and aural scale for the Met's mammoth stage (a problem *Susannah* shares with numerous other works, including most of Mozart's operas). Moreover, the orchestra frequently swamped the singers—not as a result of any musical miscalculation on the composer's part but because his score was being played by an ensemble big enough to register in so large a house.

NOT UNTIL the rise of minimalism, with its simplistic and large-scale musical gestures, did a new generation of American composers emerge who were capable of writing musically accessible operas suitable for production in large houses. Such works as Philip Glass's *Akhnaten* (1985) and John Adams's *Nixon in China* (1988), both of which emphasize broad-brush pageantry over detailed drama, were quickly taken up by companies around the world. Al-

though they proved musically too limited to stand up to repeated viewings, their short-term success had the same galvanizing effect on younger composers as did Menotti's earlier success on Broadway. But now there was a difference: American opera had become fashionable, and American houses started looking for accessible new works to produce.

Starting with the Met's production of John Corigliano's *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1991), the 90's have seen a considerable number of high-profile premieres, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*, Anthony Davis's *Amistad*, Tobias Picker's *Emmeline*, Conrad Susa's *The Dangerous Liaisons*, and Stewart Wallace's *Harvey Milk*. Many of these operas have a semi-documentary feel reminiscent of such left-wing theater pieces of the 30's as *The Cradle Will Rock* or the WPA's Federal Theater Project productions, and most of them also pay scrupulous homage to the similar political and cultural pieties of the present day. But to date, only one, Lowell Liebermann's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, has been both musically distinguished and dramatically effective.

Significantly, Liebermann's adaptation of Oscar Wilde's novel, though compact in scale and modern in the tradition-based manner of the new tonalists, has far more in common with the grandly rhetorical style of 19th-century European opera than the more intimate approach of Menotti and his followers. In this respect, *Dorian Gray* constitutes a break with recent American operatic practice—but one that, unlike minimalist opera, may prove in the long run to be artistically fruitful.

WHAT, THEN, is the future of American opera? One safe bet is that

* Interestingly, Copland's *The Tender Land*, by far the most musically impressive of these works, has had the least success with audiences, in large part because of its dramatically static libretto—proof that a good score alone is not enough to make an opera work.

such "well-made" older works as *The Consul*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Lizzie Borden* will continue to make their way into the repertoires of mid-sized opera companies (as well as onto compact disc). In that setting, their dramatic impact and superb craftsmanship can be properly appreciated, and their popularity will no doubt inspire younger classical composers to write in a similar vein.

But no less significant is the recent emergence of a group of New York-based singers and composers seeking to revitalize the musical-comedy idiom, stagnant since the 70's. The singers, foremost among them the extraordinarily gifted soprano Audra McDonald, are classically trained vocalists who have chosen to go into musical theater instead of opera. The composers, among them Adam Guettel (a grandson of Richard Rodgers, the composer of such classic 1940's mu-

sicals as *Pal Joey* and *Oklahoma!*), Michael John LaChiusa, and Jason Robert Brown, have all been influenced by Stephen Sondheim, whose "serious" musicals are themselves better suited to small- and medium-sized opera houses than to Broadway. Whether these composers will ultimately gravitate toward opera remains to be seen, but it is worth noting that Guettel's *Floyd Collins*, first produced Off Broadway in 1996, will be revived next season by Houston Grand Opera, a dramatically adventurous company whose repertoire also includes Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*.

This leaves the Met, the San Francisco Opera, and Chicago's Lyric Opera, whose outsized auditoriums make it difficult to produce small-scale operas and musical comedies effectively. In the short run, the temptation will remain strong to opt for second-rate but

easily marketed "brand-name" operatic packages like Previn's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The Met's decision to mark the millennium by commissioning an operatic version of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* suggests that it is unlikely to resist this temptation.*

In time, as the artistic and popular success of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests, the new tonalists may develop a modern grand-opera style that is as dramatically potent—and, perhaps, as characteristically American in tone and subject matter—as the "well-made" operas of the 50's and 60's. But until that happens, it seems likely that the major houses that continue to dominate opera in America will have little or no effect on the future of American opera.

* For a discussion of *Streetcar* and similar works, see my "Brand-Name Opera" in the November 1998 COMMENTARY.

American Opera on CD: A Select Discography

WHILE A number of key American operas—including *Lizzie Borden*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—have yet to appear on CD, many of the works mentioned above can be heard, in part or whole, in good-quality commercial recordings. The following list proceeds in chronological order according to date of premiere:

1934: An off-the-air recording of the Metropolitan Opera premiere of Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount* has been transferred to CD by Naxos Historical, but is not for sale in the U.S. due to copyright restrictions. Shortly before opening night, Lawrence Tibbett made a boldly sung commercial recording for Victor of the aria "Oh, 'tis an earth defiled" (Nimbus Prima Voce NI 7881).

1934: Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* was later recorded in an abridged version, sung by an ensemble conducted by the composer and drawn in large part from the cast of the original production. This famous 1947 recording has been reissued (RCA 09026-68163-2).

1935: Leontyne Price and William Warfield, who sang together in numerous stage performances of George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, recorded extended excerpts in 1963, and this historically important album has just been reissued in much-improved, digitally remastered sound (RCA 09026-63312-2).

1938: The rare original-cast 78's of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock*, featuring Howard Da Silva as Larry Foreman and accompanied by the composer at the piano, have been transferred to CD as part of a

two-disc set of early recordings of Blitzstein's music (Pearl GEMS 0009, two CD's).

1950: Decca's original-cast album of Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul*, conducted by Thomas Schippers and starring Patricia Neway, has been out of print since the early 60's, but a fine live recording, incisively conducted by Richard Hickox, was made at the 1998 Spoleto Festival and has just been released (Chandos CHAN 9706, two CD's).

1954: Aaron Copland's own 1965 recording of scenes and arias from *The Tender Land* has never been reissued in any format, but the complete opera is available on CD in an adequate studio recording conducted by Philip Brunelle and based on a 1989 concert performance by the Plymouth Music Group of Minnesota (EMI Classics 59297, two CD's).

1955: *Susannah*, Carlisle Floyd's first and most successful opera, is now available in a recording by the Lyon Opera Orchestra and Chorus, conducted by Kent Nagano and featuring Cheryl Studer, Jerry Hadley, and Samuel Ramey, the last two of whom also starred in the Metropolitan Opera's recent production (Virgin Classics CDCB 45039, two CD's).

1956: The original-cast recording of New York City Opera's production of Douglas Moore's *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, with a young Beverly Sills singing the title role, has just been reissued on CD for the first time (DGG 289 465 148-2, two CD's).

1958: The Metropolitan Opera's premiere production of Samuel Barber's *Vanessa*, conducted by Dimitri Mitro-

poulos and starring Eleanor Steber, Rosalind Elias, Regina Resnik, Nicolai Gedda, and Giorgio Tozzi, was recorded in the studio shortly after the opera's first performances (RCA 7899-2-RG, two CD's).

1996: Adam Guettel's *Floyd Collins* has been recorded by the cast of the original New York production (Nonesuch 79434-2).

In addition, Renée Fleming and Dawn Upshaw have recently issued wide-ranging anthologies of excerpts from American operas. Fleming's *I Want Magic!: American Opera Arias* contains arias from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, *Porgy and Bess*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Susannah*, *Vanessa*, and Menotti's *The Medium*, accompanied by James Levine and the

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra (London 289 460 567-2LH). Upshaw's *The World So Wide* contains arias from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, *Susannah*, *The Tender Land*, John Adams's *Nixon in China*, and Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, accompanied by David Zinman and the Orchestra of St. Luke's (Nonesuch 79458-2). Also of interest is Audra McDonald's *Way Back to Paradise*, which contains theater songs by Guettel, Jason Robert Brown, and Michael John LaChiusa (Nonesuch 79482-2).

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Books in Review

Big Picture

The Great Disruption:
Human Nature and the
Reconstitution of Social Order
by Francis Fukuyama

Free Press. 368 pp. \$26.00

Reviewed by
Charles Murray

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA likes to paint on a big canvas. He came to international attention in 1989 with an article in the *National Interest*, "The End of History?," controversially proposing that liberal democracy might constitute the end point of our political evolution. This was followed by two books, *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) and *Trust* (1995), in each of which, calling upon all the social and behavioral sciences, he grappled with the meaning of life in a world

CHARLES MURRAY is the Bradley Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the author most recently of *What It Means to Be a Libertarian and (with Richard J. Herrnstein) The Bell Curve*.

grown (hypothetically) rich and peaceful.

He has not scaled back. In his new book, *The Great Disruption*, Fukuyama takes it upon himself to explain the sudden downward slide on a wide variety of social indicators that began in the mid-1960's and in some ways is still with us: what happened, why it happened, and whether we might hope for a Great Reconstruction to follow the Great Disruption. Fukuyama has considerably broadened the many previous treatments of this topic by bringing to bear an international perspective and, still more ambitiously, by grappling with what he sees as the underlying aspects of human nature that govern large historical swings.

Fukuyama groups the social problems that characterized the Great Disruption under the headings of crime, family, and trust. The indicators for crime and family are by now familiar: steep rises in violent and property crime, a soaring divorce rate, illegitimacy ratios that went from a few percent of live births at the end of the 1950's to a third or more in the 1990's. What

may be less familiar to readers is the extent to which these same problems have plagued not just America but Western Europe.

For more than a decade now, peaceful, civil England has had a property-crime rate higher than the crime-ridden U.S. In Sweden, the Left's one-time model, the rate of violent crime is now as high as in the United States—far fewer murders, to be sure, but just as many assaults, robberies, and sex crimes. The breakdown of the family is also far advanced in most of Western Europe. England has leapfrogged America's illegitimacy ratio, going from one much lower than ours in the 1970's to one considerably higher in the 1990's. In Sweden, marriage appears to be a dying institution. Added to these indicators is a plunge in fertility, with many European countries now far below the replacement rate.

Fukuyama's treatment of the theme of trust draws on his 1995 book of the same name and is intimately linked with a central construct of *The Great Disruption*, social capital. Social capital is the "set of informal values or norms shared

among members of a group that permits cooperation among them." These shared norms facilitate one's trust that another person will act reliably and honestly, while trust itself acts "like a lubricant that makes the running of any group or organization more efficient."

Social capital, lubricated by trust, is what has let the Japanese sustain their extraordinarily low crime rate without a lot of prisons; the lack of social capital is what has saddled southern Italian villages with amoral familism (in Edward Banfield's term). Social capital makes the free market work in the United States; the lack of social capital makes a free market impossible, so far, in the former Soviet Union. During the period of the Great Disruption, Fukuyama tries to demonstrate, trust deteriorated, including trust in one's fellow citizens and trust in government; and so, inevitably, did social capital.

TURNING TO causes, Fukuyama lists four alternative explanations of the Great Disruption, each identified with a particular point of view. The contemporary Left has blamed rising crime figures and the breakdown of families on the persistence of economic and social inequality, while a smaller group of theorists, straddling the political divide, has found the culprit to be greater wealth and security. Then there are libertarians like me who concentrate on mistaken government policies. Finally, social conservatives point a finger at cultural values.

Fukuyama finds something unsatisfactory in each of these explanations, preferring instead to focus on the way many factors work in tandem to produce certain effects. For example, family breakdown has clearly had an adverse impact on the socialization of children, and that in turn has had much to do with rising crime, which in turn has fostered distrust, of neighbors in particular and of the world in general. Family breakdown similarly promotes what

Fukuyama calls the "miniaturization of community," the displacement of affiliation with large institutions (a labor federation, for example) by smaller, more local institutions (aerobics groups, Internet chat rooms) sporting a smaller "radius of trust." As for the causes of family disorder itself, they too are multiple and variegated—but the special role of the feminist revolution has been crucial, and Fukuyama devotes one long and important chapter to it.

In the end, however, what makes this book so valuable is neither Fukuyama's description of the Great Disruption nor his analysis of its proximate causes. Rather, it is his prolonged meditation on what comes next.

Where do norms come from? How do cooperation and trust emerge from them? How, once disrupted, can they be expected to reemerge? Such questions, framed in other vocabulary, were the stuff of social analysis from the Greeks to the 19th century. Is man, by nature, fitted for society? But then, for most of this century, the question virtually disappeared. The renewed interest in it is one of the happier trends in today's social science, and Fukuyama does a masterly job of surveying and synthesizing what has been learned.

He begins by laying out a useful conceptual framework. Briefly, it consists of a horizontal axis anchored on one side by pure hierarchically-generated norms (the Qu'ran's proscription of alcohol, California's proscription of smoking in restaurants) and on the other by pure spontaneously-generated norms (the incest taboo, the price of a commodity). Along the vertical axis is a continuum ranging from "rational" on the top ("rational" merely in the sense of deliberately chosen) and "arational" (meaning socially inherited) on the bottom. The four quadrants in this scheme (hierarchical/rational, spontaneous/arational, etc.) represent four basic types of norms, and Fukuyama sets

A NEW BOOK BY

Richard Pipes

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out to explain how each comes about.

Here, he draws on a wide and vivid set of examples from the sociobiological and anthropological record to demonstrate a few basic points. Most basically of all, human beings are naturally gregarious. They do not behave as the ruthlessly profit-maximizing model of *Homo economicus* would have us believe. Reciprocity, generosity, and loyalty are integral parts of human nature. Humans are not entirely trustworthy—not angels, Fukuyama repeatedly reminds us—but everything we have learned from modern behavioral and biological science gives us sound reason to think that they are indeed fitted for society.

To be sure, most of these new “findings” about human nature have also been stated in other terms, by thinkers from Aristotle to Adam Smith. But it is important at the end of our century to have the imprimatur of science on them, and I suppose we can also be said to have learned a few new things along the way, or at least to have stated old truths with greater precision. Certainly we have acquired a better understanding of the biochemical origins of behavior, and that understanding may be expected to increase. In any case, these chapters of *The Great Disruption* are uniformly fascinating.

SHIFTING GEARS abruptly, the book takes us into the world of organizational theory, which, as Fukuyama sees it, is increasingly in sync with the sources of human cooperation. The 20th century began with Max Weber telling us that the essence of modernity was bureaucracy. It ends with bureaucracies everywhere in decline, replaced by spontaneous, self-organized markets and networks.

These two things are not identical, Fukuyama explains. In a market, agreements and cooperation require only a minimal set of shared values. That minimal set includes

some exceedingly important items, especially a common agreement to engage in voluntary, good-faith transactions. But in every other aspect of their lives, the members of a market can be highly individualistic. They do not even need to like each other.

By contrast, a network is defined by larger shared values. The members of the Sierra Club are part of a network, and so are members of a kinship group or a religion. For that matter, organizations that are putatively market-driven routinely take on some of the characteristics of a network, as in the development of corporate cultures that shape behavior far beyond the narrow terms of a job description.

Fukuyama, putting distance between himself and libertarians, is careful to note the limits of markets and networks alike. Although their spontaneity and flexibility give them great range and vitality, some degree of hierarchy, he believes, is necessary, especially in large social units. Gossip, for example, can be a wonderful mechanism of control in a community of 50 to 100 people; in an anonymous urban neighborhood, it needs to be replaced by more formal systems. And besides, Fukuyama notes, people *like* to organize themselves hierarchically. What they dislike, he observes trenchantly, “is not hierarchy in principle, but hierarchies in which they end up on the bottom.” Hierarchies, including powerful government hierarchies, we will always have with us.

WHERE, THEN, are we left? Fukuyama urges us, as a first step, to reject the notion that the engine of our destruction is, as some on both Left and Right would have it, capitalism itself, relentlessly eating away at our social capital. Quite the contrary. Although he seldom says anything unequivocally, on this point Fukuyama is unequivocal:

Montesquieu and Adam Smith were right in arguing that commerce tended to improve morals;

[Edmund] Burke, Daniel Bell [in *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*], and [the British social critic] John Gray are wrong to assert that capitalism necessarily undercuts its own moral basis or more broadly that the Enlightenment is self-undermining.

It is not capitalism that worries Fukuyama but the state. Governments, he believes, can help generate social capital—the American public educational system in the first half of this century is his example—but they can also destroy it. Are modern liberal states ineluctably drawn to promote individualism at the expense of social capital? Not necessarily, Fukuyama tells us, but he does not sound wholly confident. For government, the trick is not to contrive artificial ways of restoring social capital but to provide an environment in which the natural human tendencies to create norms and values can reassert themselves.

About the likelihood of this happening, Fukuyama is refreshingly sanguine. In the 1820's, he reminds us, the United States was mired in a slough of alcoholism and crime; a few years later, it had been turned around by the Second Great Awakening. Similarly, 19th-century England was caught in the grip of the most wrenching national economic transformation in history: within a matter of decades, it shifted from a country of agrarian hamlets to an urbanized industrial power suffering from all the severe social ills that Charles Dickens would make notorious. But by the second half of the century, even as the economic transformation continued at full force, Victorian middle-class values had been propagated so relentlessly that crime dropped to the very low levels that would remain characteristic of English society all the way through the first two-thirds of the 20th century.

We have seen the pendulum swing many times before: from li-

cense to prudery, from profligacy to thrift, from social chaos to social order. Social capital will be regenerated in the natural course of things: that is the central theme through which Fukuyama draws together the many strands of his argument. Maybe all we need to do is wait.

FUKUYAMA'S HISTORICAL reconstruction is persuasive, and his understanding of human nature is one with which I emphatically agree. My reservations lie primarily in his tendency to use society as a whole as his unit of analysis. Where he tends to aggregate, I would often prefer to disaggregate.

Doing so tempers his picture in interesting ways. A strong case can be made, for example, that even as trust of fellow citizens was deteriorating appallingly in some parts of America—like inner cities—in others, both trust and civil institutions were continuing to function largely unchanged. Similarly, the loss of trust itself needs to be disaggregated. When it comes to government, a loss of trust in the courts is palpably bad because the rule of law is at stake, but what about a loss of trust in the efficacy of government programs? To me the latter sounds like part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Disaggregation is especially important in thinking about the future, where Fukuyama's wide-angled focus may yield too bright a picture. As it happens, I see harbingers of a Great Reconstruction everywhere—for the middle class on up. We may even be entering a golden age, recovering from the destructive intellectual fads of the recent past and rediscovering our attraction to the beautiful and the true, with technology providing wonderful new possibilities—for the middle class on up. But meanwhile there is the other part of American society—the part often called the underclass—that was the source of many of the statistical trends that define the Great Disruption.

America, after the Great Disruption, is split in a way that it was not split prior to 1965. The underclass is not just a traditional lower class, eager to climb the ladder to middle-class respectability, but a segment of society that is acquiring a code, structure, and culture of its own. It has the ability, through its own underground economy and through the assistance extended to it by government policy, to exist independently of the rest of society. It is increasingly white, and it is increasingly making inroads into the working class.

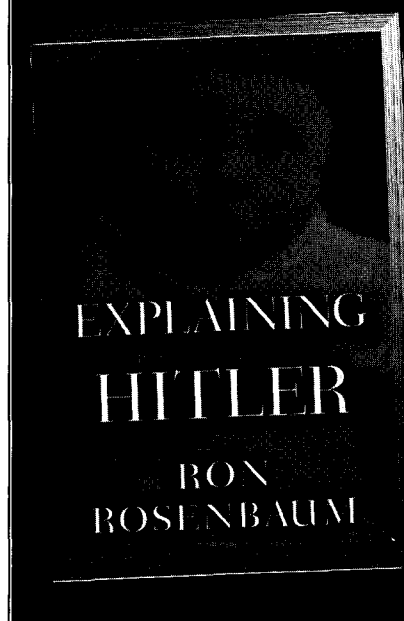
Added to this is one of the most potent variables that will shape social structure in the 21st century: intelligence. Any attempt to think through the question of where technology and the information economy are taking us must come to grips with the radically different ways this process will play out depending on an individual's IQ. The smart are

going to do extremely well. The average will do all right. Those of low intelligence are going to be excluded from many more social goods than we can now imagine. They are in danger of becoming economically and, worse, socially superfluous. Combine this with the presence of a sizable underclass, and even in the face of a regeneration of social capital of the kind Fukuyama foresees, America is likely to be a markedly different place from the country we knew prior to 1965.

These, at least, are the strictures of one who has been working some of the same territory as Fukuyama. But put them aside. *The Great Disruption* takes on questions that go to the heart of social policy writ large. It is written with never-failing lucidity, brings together vast and disparate literatures, and makes one think in new ways about the prospects of post-industrial society. That is quite enough for one book.

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A Journey to the
End of the Millennium:
A Novel of the Middle Ages

by A.B. Yehoshua
translated by
Nicholas de Lange

Doubleday. 352 pp. \$24.95

Reviewed by
Alan Mintz

THE AUTHOR of such widely admired works as *Facing the Forests* (1966), *The Lover* (1977), and *A Late Divorce* (1982), A.B. Yehoshua is generally regarded as Israel's best living novelist. His fiction, which began appearing in the early 1960's, has consistently probed the changing tenor of Israeli society over the tumultuous decades. A controversialist of note, Yehoshua has also earned a reputation as one of the country's most outspoken intellectuals on the Left, polemicizing against religion and Diaspora Jewry and in favor of the "normalization" of Israel as a secular state within the Middle East. Now, in a move that he actually felt the need to justify to the Israeli reading public, he has turned away from the concerns of the day and toward history—medieval history, at that—for the subject of his latest novel.

This is not, to be sure, Yehoshua's first fictional attempt to escape the overheated present, or at least to come at it from a different direction. In *Mr. Mani* (English translation, 1992), Yehoshua delved back into the middle of the 19th century, working his way forward to the present through a series of peculiar monologues. But his new novel takes a much bigger leap backward, all the way to the year 999—the very verge of a millennium that, in Christian Europe, excited much greater frenzy than the imminent coming of our own.

ALAN MINTZ teaches Hebrew literature at Brandeis and is completing a book on the Holocaust and American culture.

The novel's point of departure is the breakup of a mercantile partnership. For ten years, a Jewish merchant from Tangier named Ben Attar, together with a local Muslim, has annually transported a shipload of Mediterranean merchandise to northern Europe; there, Ben Attar's nephew Abulafia, an exile from Tangier, has sold the fragrant spices and colorful fabrics to Europeans who, as the millennium approaches, are increasingly hungry for goods redolent of the East. But the lucrative partnership is threatened with dissolution when the wealthy and large-hearted Ben Attar takes a second wife, a practice fully sanctioned by the religious norms of his own North African Jewish community but unknown among Ashkenazi Jews, where it was to be formally banned by rabbinic edict during this period.

The objection comes from Esther-Minna, wife to Ben Attar's nephew Abulafia and herself the daughter of a distinguished Rhineland rabbinic family. Esther-Minna sees in her uncle-in-law's bigamy not only a moral scandal but also a threat to the exclusivity of her own marriage. Ben Attar, in turn, stung by news of her repudiation, gathers his two wives and journeys northward in order to demonstrate by personal example—and legal argument—the sufficiency of his amorous solicitude for his expansive household. The novel tracks the merchant's quest for vindication as he journeys by sea first to Paris, then overland to the Rhineland city of Worms, then back to Paris, whence, after two legal disputations in rabbinic courts, and after the death of one of his two wives, he returns to his Mediterranean home.

THE JOURNEY alluded to in the novel's title is twofold in nature: the journey of a Sephardi merchant into the Ashkenazi heartland and the journey of a contemporary Israeli writer into the depths of medieval Jewish history. In setting his narrative during the last days of the first Christian millennium, Yehoshua is not just ex-

ploiting echoes of our own historical moment but focusing on a particularly rich moment in the Jewish past.

Within the sphere of Mediterranean Jewry, the sphere of the Ben Attars, this was a period of fruitful cultural collaboration between Muslims and Jews, the joint inheritors in Arabic of the traditions of Greek philosophy, before the eruption of a wave of Islamic fundamentalism and persecution that, long before the Christian reconquest of Spain, would signal trouble ahead. In Northern Europe, likewise, there was still a century to go before the Crusader massacres of Rhineland Jewish communities would cast their pall of martyrdom over the next thousand years of Jewish-Christian relations. Rabbinic dynasties like the Kalonymids (the family to which Esther-Minna belongs) had been invited by the princes of the Holy Roman Empire to move from Italy to the Germanic lands; there they settled, establishing colonies distinguished by commercial, intellectual, and spiritual enterprise.

In short, Yehoshua's *Journey to the End of the Millennium* unfolds at a time when, contrary to many of our own received historical notions, the rage of the nations against the Jews was a less burning issue than the differences of the Jews among themselves. And indeed the best part of this novel lies in its evocation of the disparate worlds of its Jewish characters: the vividly colored robes and veils of the southern visitors and their worldly brand of piety against the marshy drabness of the Rhineland towns whose Jews wear peculiar horn-shaped hats and practice a more pinched form of religion. Particularly fascinating is the way that Yehoshua handles the issue of language. The southerners speak Arabic, the northerners Frankish or High German, the language that, admixed with Hebrew, will eventually become Yiddish. The embroiled nature of cultural relations is nicely reflected in the pragmatic difficul-

ties of communication between Jew and Jew, and in the variety of devices and impromptu translators mobilized to negotiate their differences.

The chief enabling vehicle is the Hebrew language itself. A common possession of the male elites of both Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jewry, Hebrew, like Latin, served in the Middle Ages as a *lingua franca* not just of learned commentaries and epistles but of spoken communication as well. *Journey to the End of the Millennium* is of course written in modern Hebrew, which is quite different from medieval Hebrew. But for the purposes of this novel Yehoshua has fashioned a literary language that reverberates with just enough antique inflection and lush semantic richness to create an effect of intriguing strangeness, an effect successfully carried over in Nicholas de Lange's adept translation.

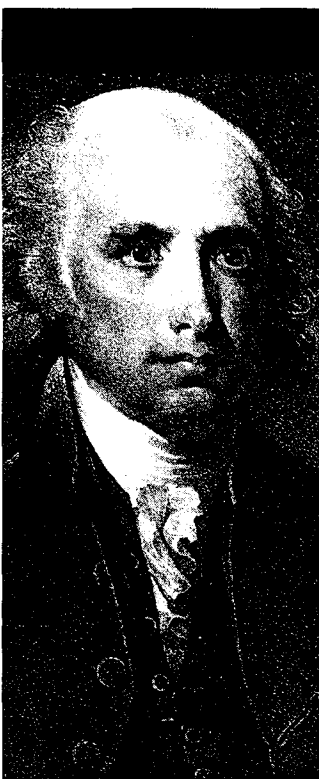
STILL, DESPITE the exotic spell cast by Yehoshua's writing, we are never unaware that this novel, like all historical novels, is in the end not really about history, or at least not about history of the dead-and-buried kind. Contemporary Israel and its own fraught brand of identity politics is never far from the surface, and neither is Yehoshua's palpable intention of thumbing his nose at the psychological makeup of the Ashkenazi Jews who founded Israel and until recently dominated its political culture.

This, too, represents something of a departure for him. Although born into an old Sephardi family in Jerusalem, Yehoshua evinced little interest in his own origins until fairly late in his career. But *Journey to the End of the Millennium* makes up for the lacuna with a vengeance, in fully exploring what might be called the mystique of Sephardism. Seen through the lens of the Ben Attars, representatives of a great Mediterranean civilization at its apogee, the beleaguered northern settlements moored in the depth of European Christendom are made to appear particularly pitiable, their religious

life crabbed, parochial, legalistic, and defensive, their culture entirely shorn of poetry or of delight in the created world. These northern Jews, in brief, are recognizable progenitors of today's ultra-Orthodox (at least, in the conventional secular stereotype of them).

The real tragedy, in Yehoshua's conception, is that in the battle of wills between the merchant from Tangier and his northern co-religi-

onists, a battle marked by many reversals as the antagonists struggle to deploy the protocols of talmudic law to their respective advantage, it is the merchant, the bearer of a resplendent civilization, who in the end falters, undercutting his own cause. After triumphing in one disputation, Ben Attar agrees to engage in another whose disastrous outcome is foretold by his self-destructive need for vindication. It is not enough for Ben



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Gary Rosen

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Attar to win a reinstatement of his trading partnership; he must have these austere European rabbis recognize the legitimacy of his double marriage and the superior largeness of heart it represents. Just so, the novel implies, in the Israel of today, the gifts of Sephardism—vividness, vitality, generosity of spirit—have been vitiated by a fatal vulnerability, a felt need on the part of Sephardim themselves to be confirmed by the culture of what was once the North and is now the West.

IT IS difficult to tell just how seriously Yehoshua takes these artificial cultural dichotomies. But upon the endearing figure of Ben Attar, who demonstrates through his passionate attentions to both his wives that love is not a limited human resource, he has certainly built a very large philosophical scaffolding. In the novel, Sephardi culture at the height of its classical vigor is made into nothing

less than the bearer of Eros, while Ashkenazi culture in its incipient legal pietism becomes the bearer of Thanatos.

Thus, to the Ashkenazi judges hearing Ben Attar's case, the threat posed by bigamy is not so much the small-minded problems of jealousy and licentiousness as the seditious implications of unfettered desire—or, in the fearful thoughts of one judge, the idea that sexual "duplication inevitably leads to multiplication, and multiplication has no limits." These ideas are at once profound—too profound—and stale, reminiscent of nothing so much as the banal Cartesian geometry of love-against-death once propounded by Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, and assorted other countercultural gurus.

MUCH OF Yehoshua's previous fiction has been similarly bedeviled by undigested and thesis-laden Big Ideas of one kind or another. For-

tunately, his characters and his situations are usually so finely realized as to redeem the enterprise. Such is the case here again. What is more, for readers who have followed his work till now, *Journey to the End of the Millennium* marks an intriguing set of new alignments.

The protagonists of Yehoshua's early fiction were unrelievedly alienated and impotent, and Yehoshua showed them little mercy. Their world, dissociated and indeterminate, was mirrored in the Hebrew employed to describe it, a language that self-consciously strove to expunge its virtually unexpungeable layers of historical nuance. This new novel, with its exotic medieval setting, its rich linguistic texture, and its strongly individuated characters, is clearly something else again. One can be sure Yehoshua will return in his fiction to the embroiled present of Israeli society, yet, now that he has immersed himself so deeply and so profitably in historical waters, one is also interested to see what will stick to his pen.

The Other War

Endgame: Solving the Iraq Problem—Once and For All
by Scott Ritter

Simon & Schuster. 240 pp. \$22.00

Tyranny's Ally
by David Wurmser

AEI Press. 166 pp. \$14.95

Reviewed by
Bret Louis Stephens

A short six months ago, President Clinton announced the commencement of Operation Desert Fox, until the war in Kosovo the most aggressive military action undertaken by his administration. Because of Kosovo, our adventure in Iraq has received scant attention

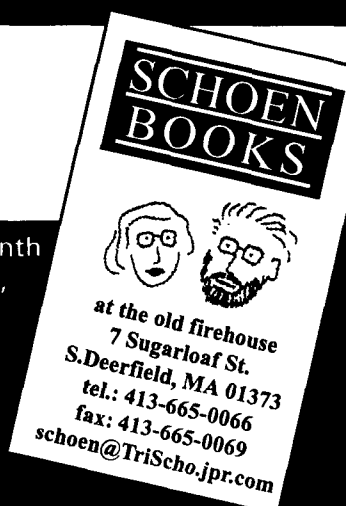
BRET LOUIS STEPHENS is the assistant editorial-features editor of the Wall Street Journal.

Once upon a time, there was a young man named Ken who collected books. Soon, there were so many books, and so little room, that he realized he had to become a bookdealer and move to bigger digs.

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lately. But it is hardly over, and what the story of its unfolding says about the overall nature of American diplomatic and military strategy is most discouraging.

Operation Desert Fox began on December 16, 1998. Over the course of the next four days, 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles rained down on Iraqi military and industrial facilities, damaging or destroying a total of 97 targets. Coming as it did after two previous threatened military strikes against Iraq had been called off at the last minute, and at the very moment the House of Representatives was debating the President's impeachment, Desert Fox struck many observers as an effort at manipulation taken at a moment of maximum political danger. But if this was President Clinton's intention, it did not have the desired effect: after a brief pause, the House voted to impeach.

Whatever may have impelled the decision to strike Iraq, Desert Fox was an appalling failure. The targets selected were of slight strategic value; Saddam Hussein emerged unscathed and politically emboldened; UNSCOM, the United Nations inspection body set up to dismantle Iraq's chemical, biological, nuclear, and ballistic-missile arsenals, was effectively shut down; and the United States found itself diplomatically isolated and hard put to sustain the regime of economic sanctions that form the core of its Iraq policy.

Since then, we have been engaged in a sporadic, low-level air campaign against Saddam as he seeks to challenge the "no-fly zones" that are one of the last vestiges of the receding American position. How long this war of attrition can last, and what larger purpose it serves, are questions the administration has thus far failed to address. But they are addressed, thoughtfully and in interesting detail, by Scott Ritter in *Endgame* and by David Wurmser in *Tyranny's Ally*.

OF THE two books, *Endgame* is the more timely. Its author is the no-

nonsense former U.S. Marine who resigned last August as UNSCOM's chief inspector amid allegations that the Clinton administration was attempting to subvert the inspection process and to besmirch him personally through baseless charges that he had engaged in espionage on behalf of Israel.

Ritter divides his narrative into three sections. The first deals with the history of Saddam's regime, the second with his own seven years as an UNSCOM inspector; a final chapter offers a set of policy prescriptions. There is also a tersely written and thoroughly frightening appendix listing Iraq's current weapons of mass destruction.

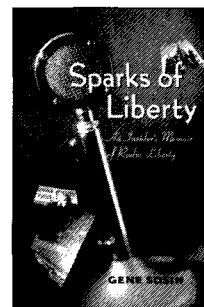
Ritter's recounting of how Iraq evolved into a brutal and uncompromising police state under the rule of Saddam Hussein is not especially remarkable, although it does include some piquant details. Far more noteworthy is his depiction of Saddam's ceaseless efforts to acquire and develop weapons of mass destruction whose value as instruments of terror, to be used against enemies both within and without, trumped all considerations of efficiency or cost.

Saddam had already employed mustard gas to terrible effect against Kurdish civilians in 1988, and even more successfully against Iranian troops in the closing days of the Iran-Iraq war. In that same year, as Ritter relates, he put the program into high gear. Huge industrial complexes were set up to produce nerve agents and to "weaponize" pathogenic bacteria, and contracts were signed with a broad range of Western companies to supply essential equipment. Iraq also took steps that have brought it remarkably close to developing a nuclear capability.

When Ritter joined UNSCOM shortly after the Gulf war in 1991, many observers thought the agency's job would be essentially to mop up: it was widely believed that the bulk of the Iraqi arsenal had been

destroyed, and that Saddam's tenure in office hung by a thread. Those assessments were completely wrong. Saddam not only survived, but he undertook active and highly successful measures to conceal his arsenal from UNSCOM. What ensued was an almost decade-long, high-stakes game of hide-and-seek.

Ritter writes colorfully about what inspections were actually like. Most turned up nothing; and even when UNSCOM got its targets right, staging "no-notice" visits to suspect sites, the Iraqis would go to sometimes comically brazen lengths to delay or frustrate its work. On several occasions, inspectors found themselves facing guns or being pelted with eggs and fruit by "spontaneously" assembled Iraqi mobs. More often than not, the Iraqis would scurry out the rear door with their proscribed documents or equipment as Ritter and his staff attempted to enter via the front.



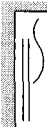
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An Insider's Memoir of Radio Liberty

GENE SOSIN

"Mr. Sosin's book is significant for more than its entertainment and historical value, although both are ample. It is a road map for broadcasters of the future to follow as they create Radio Free Asia and Radio Free Iraq, stations aimed at liberating those who live under the dictatorial regimes at Baghdad, Beijing, and Pyongyang. It is also a story of Jewish interest, intersecting at key junctures with the tale of the struggle to free Soviet Jewry."—*Forward*

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Iraqi resistance was only one part of UNSCOM's problems, however. The prime difficulty lay in Washington and at the United Nations. By 1996, China, Russia, and France were beginning to tire of sanctions, and were leaning on UNSCOM to issue Iraq a clean bill of health. Britain and the U.S. were on the other side. This growing rift within the UN did not go unnoticed in Baghdad. With the Security Council split, Saddam was in a position to harass the inspectors with near-impunity.

In June 1996, the Iraqi dictator signed a secret agreement with the UN, securing UNSCOM's continued presence in Iraq but putting a range of critical facilities off-limits. Two years later, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright agreed to yet another secret protocol that further hampered Ritter's work. By August 1998, Ritter resigned, issuing his dramatic public protest.

THOUGH HE tells a riveting story, and paints throughout a grim picture of the Iraqi menace, the prescriptions Ritter draws from his observations and experiences are disappointing and ultimately unconvincing. The United States, he asserts, has neither the will nor the international support to rid the world of Saddam Hussein, or even to contain him indefinitely. Therefore, we would be better off cutting a deal. In brief, Ritter proposes replacing the current U.S. nonpolicy with a kind of Marshall Plan in which Saddam would agree to recognize Israel and an autonomous Kurdistan in exchange for an infusion of aid.

It cannot be denied that there is a kind of surface logic to this view, the more so since France, Russia, and other countries have seemed prepared to embrace something like it. But the fact is that Ritter's proposal would merely trade material U.S. assistance for yet another round of hollow Iraqi pledges. His "deal" would enable Saddam to rebuild Iraq's once-fearsome military machine, rehabilitate him as a legitimate actor in

the region, betray Arab allies of ours who have steadfastly opposed him, and send a signal of weakness to other would-be regional hegemonies around the world.

Unfortunately, Ritter does not even weigh these counterarguments, let alone try to rebut them. Though his personal strengths, including the bravery he exhibited in carrying out his job, shine through in this book, his limits as a political analyst are, in the end, no less apparent.

DAVID WURMSER has a better idea. A Middle East specialist at the American Enterprise Institute, Wurmser is convinced that our troubles in the region stem from an entrenched if unstated belief that Arabs are incapable of democratic self-rule, and that centralized dictatorships are therefore a necessary "force for stability." A corollary in the case of Iraq is that a unified country is by definition preferable to a fractured one.

These are the flawed premises, Wurmser writes, that inform current U.S. policy, leading us to seek an end to our troubles in Iraq by means of a "silver-bullet" coup that would remove Saddam but preserve the dominant power structure. Such a policy, however, promises only the replacement of one brutal despot with another, and anyway, after eight years and many failed attempts at a coup, shows no chance of succeeding.

Wurmser's alternative is a broad-based insurgency, one that would pit the Kurds in the north and the restive Shiite Muslim population in the south against the Sunni Muslims who dominate the state. He himself is a partisan of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), the umbrella organization set up in the U.S.-protected "safe haven" in the north that has tried to unite Iraq's various opposition groups under a democratic, anti-Saddam banner. In 1995, an INC army undertook to march on territory held by Saddam Hussein; it was crushed because the U.S. reneged on promises of support. But

Wurmser still holds high hopes for the INC, provided it can get adequate backing.

WOULD A more active American policy, centered on fostering an insurgency of the kind laid out in *Tyranny's Ally*, really do more than provide an attractive way of putting pressure on Saddam? There is room for doubt. *Maybe* an INC army, trained and supplied by the United States, would stand a chance against Saddam's vastly superior forces (though most observers, including Ritter, rate its chances at nil). *Maybe* credible Iraqi moderates can be found to bring order out of chaos without resorting to the institutionalized violence most Middle Eastern states have traditionally relied upon. *Maybe* a federalized or retribalized Iraq, partitioned among Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the center, and Shiites in the south, could somehow survive the divide-and-conquer efforts of predatory outsiders like Syria and Iran. But that is a lot of maybes. The recent history of the region does not inspire tremendous confidence in Wurmser's scenarios.

Still, whatever its problems, Wurmser's path is at least a path, as opposed to the aimless wandering represented by the Clinton policy. And it has the undeniable merit, again in contrast with present policy, of being consonant with the principles—an end to tyranny, the forthright promotion of freedom—we have successfully stood for elsewhere around the world. Saddam might survive in any case, but at a minimum a genuine American effort would have been mounted to rid the world of his menace.

Given where we are at the moment, that would assuredly be a net plus. But given how wildly American foreign policy has oscillated in the six months that have elapsed since Operation Desert Fox, it would seem more unlikely than ever that anything even remotely so promising will come to pass.

A Writer's Writer

Selected Poems
by Jorge Luis Borges
edited by Alexander Coleman
Viking. 478 pp. \$40.00

Collected Fictions
by Jorge Luis Borges
translated by Andrew Hurley
Viking. 565 pp. \$40.00

Reviewed by
Marc Berley

BORN IN Buenos Aires 100 years ago, Jorge Luis Borges devoted his life to the preservation and investigation of books, first as a municipal suburban librarian and later

MARC BERLEY is executive director of the Foundation for Academic Standards & Tradition (FAST). He has taught literature at Columbia and Rutgers.

as the director of the National Library of Argentina. From the early 1920's until his death in 1986, he also lived a private life as a writer's writer, crafting exquisitely fantastic—and, appropriately, bookish—fictions that eventually won him a reputation as a 20th-century master, on a par with Joyce and Kafka (to mention two with whom he is often compared).

Among his fellow Latin American writers, appraisals of Borges have been divided since the beginning of his career. Although he excited interest because of the aesthetic possibilities he unearthed in a universe conceived of and in books, for some of his colleagues he too blatantly transgressed the local commandment that fiction should address itself to the political conditions of Latin American society. Thus, the novelist, and leftist, Gabriel García Marquez in 1967: "He is one of the writers . . . I have read most, and yet

he is perhaps the one I like least." Why? Because he "writes about mental realities, he is sheer evasion."

To this it must be added that Borges's own quirky but decidedly nonleftist politics were no more palatable to his critics than his unwillingness to make them part of his fiction. "My convictions with respect to political matters are well known," he wrote in 1970:

I have joined the Conservative party (which act is a form of skepticism), and no one has ever called me a Communist, a nationalist, an anti-Semite, or a supporter of . . . [the 19th-century right-wing dictator Jean Manuel de] Rosas. I believe that in time we will have reached the point where we will deserve to be free of government. I have never hidden my opinions, even through the difficult years, but I have never allowed them to intrude upon my literary pro-



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duction, either, save that one time when I praised [Israel's] Six-Day war.

TWO NEW collections of Borges's work have come out in the past year, and a third (*Selected Nonfictions*) is due soon. *Selected Poems* represents about half of his verse production, and gives us, on facing pages, the Spanish originals and English translations (by about a dozen hands).

Borges's earliest poems paint a picture of a very literary young man in love with his city—its streets, houses, light, and sounds—and with the dignity of his ancestors. ("He wrote his roll of deeds/in prose inflexible as battlesinging trumpets," Borges memorialized his great-grandfather, who in 1824 successfully led a regiment against Spanish forces in Peru.) Then, from about 1930 to 1960, the years of his best fiction, Borges abandoned poetry altogether. When he returned, it was to the same subjects and themes: Buenos Aires, his forebears, literature, and language.

In general, Borges's poetry is most powerful when it is about personal matters—including the encroaching blindness that by the 1960's had robbed him of the capacity to read—and also when it is most concrete. It is at its worst when abstract, which is much too often. Ideas that flourish in Borges's narrative prose founder in verse. As he himself wrote in 1929, in "all poets who are worthy of being read again and again," the lyrical and the intellectual must "co-exist." Unfortunately, in his case they only rarely do.

But if *Selected Poems* makes for a lackluster centenary celebration, *Collected Fictions* is something else again. It offers, in one volume and in a fine translation by Andrew Hurley, all of Borges's remarkable and often indelible meditations on time, memory, infinity, the meaning of life, the value of art, chance, morality, and other subjects that are as fit for philosophical as for literary investigation. Despite the largeness of these themes, most of Borges's stories are short, and some are very short. It is "madness," he once wrote, to compose "vast books—setting out in 500 pages an idea that can be perfectly related orally in five minutes."

Borges published a number of volumes of stories over the decades, and all of them appear in *Collected Fictions* in chronological order. But his two earliest—and especially the second of them—are justly considered his best.

The first, *A Universal History of Iniquity* (1935), focuses on bad people who spoil for fame and battle, and includes stories about, among other strange types, *barrio* knife fighters, a woman pirate, and Billy the Kid. One begins with "two toughs sheathed in grave black clothing [doing] the tango of evenly matched knives" until the death of one of them "brings the dance without music to its end." Of Billy the Kid, who "never fully measured up to the legend of himself, though he came closer and closer as time

went on," we are told that he "died at the age of twenty-one owing a debt to human justice for the deaths of 21 men—'not counting Mexicans.'" Death, often gruesome, seems to be not just the resolution but the point of these careers conducted for the sake of notoriety.

In Borges's own later description of the trajectory of his career, he soon "moved on from the mythologies of the slums and outskirts of the city to games with time and infinity." His second collection, the highly celebrated *Fictions* (1944), contains such masterpieces as "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," "The Lottery in Babylon," and "The Library of Babel."

In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," the narrator—who is named Borges—is trying to research "the entire history of an unknown planet," an encyclopedic account of which has been brought to his attention by another Argentinian writer. This veriginous search for a nonexistent account of a nonexistent planet leads to fantastic descriptions of an imagined civilization that, in eerie and finally alarming ways, turns out to mirror our own.

A similar mirror-like effect underlies "The Lottery in Babylon," a fable of an entire country attempting to limit the uncertainties that bedevil the human condition. Its favored means is a clever-seeming innovation: a game of "twofold chance" every 60 nights in which some win prizes while others win punishments that include maiming and death. As people become addicted to the lottery, and above all to its punishments, they begin perversely to enjoy "all the vicissitudes of terror and hope" they had thought to escape by means of the lottery itself.

A stringent morality stands behind Borges's fictionalized searches. In his earliest stories, the ugly deaths of the iniquitous suggest that human justice does eventually exact its "debt"—a lesson reinforced by Borges's chilling visual descriptions of his protagonists' ends. Later stories go farther. "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis



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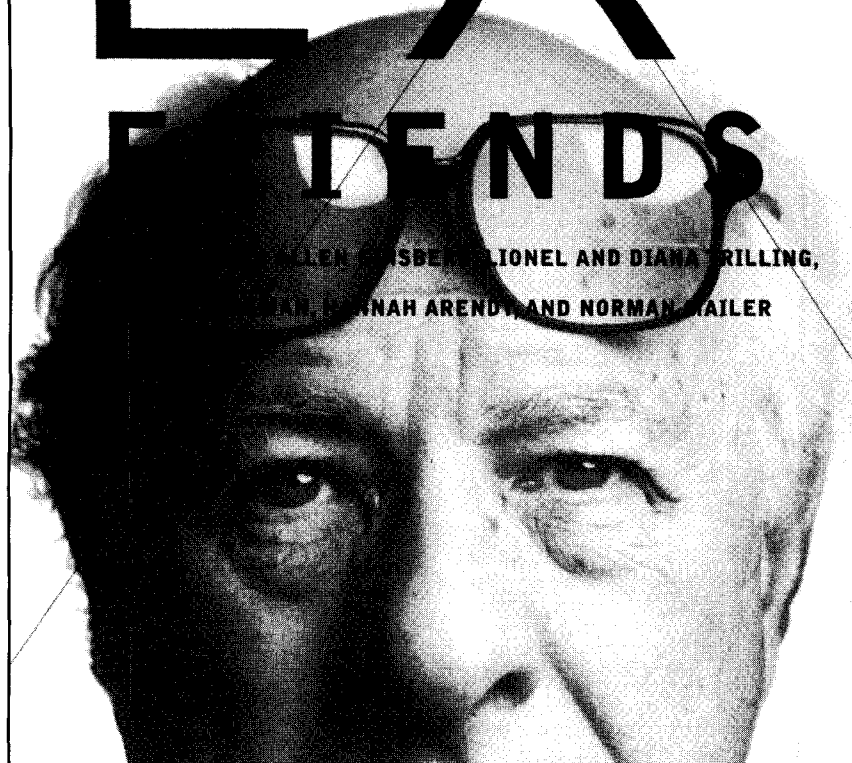
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Tertius" is a haunting portrayal of what can happen when a society seeks "to prove to the nonexistent God that mortals could conceive and shape a world," while "The Lottery of Babylon" warns of the terrible consequences that issue from the undisciplined hope of creating through artifice a better world.

In short, far from evading reality, as Marquez charged, Borges uses his bookish imagination to investigate the human penchant for, precisely, evading reality. To accomplish this, he seduces us back into Plato's cave of images, the false but alluring world of shadows from which we can learn, at great labor, properly to evaluate objects and events in the world of blinding light. For Borges, working in the medium of fiction, this is an exercise requiring highly ironic narrative structures with many intricately woven levels of meaning and reference—a technique that to the unconditioned

reader can sometimes seem ridiculous or merely fanciful, but whose effect is in the end simultaneously mesmerizing and cathartic.

If Borges did not write about himself or about Argentina the way some of his fellow Latin Americans desired him to, he accomplished something grander and more enduring. One of our last true humanists, living through languages, books, and history, he condensed into unforgettable fictions the experience of intellect speaking to and about the world. This alone ensures his place as a matchless man of modern letters.

Predicting the Past

Dark Continent:
Europe's Twentieth Century
by Mark Mazower

Knopf. 512 pp. \$30.00

Reviewed by
David Pryce-Jones

AT THE start of this century, Europe was the center of the world's civilization. There was every hope that its politics, arts, and sciences would spread universally. Instead, a protracted struggle occurred as the historic states of the continent were obliged to defend themselves against German and Russian expansionism and its avatars, Nazism and Communism. If it had not been for the steadfast support of America, these states and their democracies would have been overwhelmed. The experience has left Europe today exhausted, offering little in the way of a political model even to its own populations.

This story of decline and fall is the theme of *Dark Continent* by Mark Mazower, a young British historian and the author of a previous

book about the German occupation of Greece. Mazower is nothing if not ambitious. He has read widely in several languages, his reach is exceedingly long, and he is a strong writer, capable of providing arresting details and no less arresting observations. But as a historian, he has a peculiar sense of reality. Indeed, history to him is less about human beings with wills of their own than it is a dialectic of ideas. *Dark Continent* is essentially an exposition of those ideas, and of the thesis that supposedly explains them.

ACCORDING TO this thesis, democracy, Nazism, and Communism are not as distinct—or in such rivalry—as we might think. Under the banner of each idea, political superstructures in 20th-century Europe attempted to grapple with the one true and abiding social issue: namely, the proper relationship between the individual and the collective. Of the three, Mazower believes that Communism came the closest to a satisfactory solution, not only in theory but even in practice.

With zeal, Mazower deconstructs democracy, or "bourgeois" democracy as he invariably puts it. After World War I, he writes, there was no agreed-upon or viable definition of democracy in Europe. To some, democracy was synonymous with the nation; but that allowed the exclusion and persecution of minorities. To others, democracy was a synonym for capitalism; but that meant inequality and injustice. Still others maintained that, since all nations ought to be deciding their fate for themselves as decreed by President Woodrow Wilson, imperial powers like Britain and France were immoral and hypocritical, with no right to consider themselves democracies at all.

The consequence of this conceptual weakness was that, by the end of the 20's, the new nations that had emerged after the Versailles peace treaties came to be ruled not by democratic governments but by au-



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thoritarian or nonparliamentary regimes. But in any case, Mazower contends, the ranks of those ostensibly seeking to lay the foundations of the democratic state had been filled from the beginning with crackpots and social engineers of one kind or another; or with eugenicists promoting the national and racial stock; or with theorists of the gold standard, trade protectionism, and the like. It was thus all but predetermined that "democracy" would find its concrete expression in the evil of capitalism or imperialism or nationalism; in one or another or all of these it had virtually strangled itself to death by the time the Depression came along to put paid to an era.

Nazism, Mazower argues, was itself another form of European imperialism, fitting into European history "far more comfortably than most people like to admit." But at least it had at its heart a genuine social vision, namely, the welfare state. Unfortunately, this state was to be based strictly on race. Since, according to Nazi doctrine, there was no universal morality or law, there was no reason to refrain from dealing with minorities ruthlessly. As long as the program was carried out according to Nazi norms—that is, according to the two "intimately connected" norms of Aryan welfare at home and warfare with all others abroad—even genocide was not out of place; nor was it, in the event, shocking to most Germans. Of course, by making enemies and victims of all the peoples whom they could not include in their collective, Nazism destroyed everyone, and in the end the Germans too.

But then there was Communism. Historians of Russia generally depict Bolshevism either as a mutation of czarism—that is, a cruel modern version of an ancestral despotism—or as a monstrous system of its own. For Mazower, it was indeed a new system, but far from monstrous. On the contrary, it represented a real effort "to tackle the problems of mass

politics, of industrialization and social order."

As cities and factories arose in Soviet Russia, Mazower writes, the individual found himself in a collective with "an image of energy" with which he could identify. Moreover, in the Soviet Union a solution had at last been found to the troublesome question of nationalities and minorities. Here was a federal union, genuine and benign, in which Ukrainians, for example, could "contrast the violent police repression they faced against their culture in Poland with the situation in the Soviet republic, at least until the famine of the early 1930's, and perhaps after that."

Stalinism, to be sure, "meant terror and repression." But it also meant, Mazower continues, "upward mobility and exciting new life chances." Nor, "in the final analysis," could Stalinist terror be "separated from the ultimate justification for the party's existence—its role in the transformation of society." That this was a necessary and desirable transformation, Mazower leaves no doubt.

IF THIS was the situation prior to World War II, after 1945 Europe had another chance to remake itself. Mass murder and deportations had by now homogenized the population of almost every nation-state. But in the democracies of the West, the same old idea-mongers were at their wonted tasks. Their tortuous and inconsistent attempts to create a viable collective identity now issued in the form of the "democratic" welfare state. But this was a culturally bastardized and materially Americanized creation, a welfare state that promoted prosperity in a spiritual void and pushed Europe aimlessly from crisis to crisis. Today, with capitalism having "wiped out" (Mazower's term) the European working class, social progress has "lost its charm" as a collective project; and as for true democratic individualism, that too is hard to find.

In the satellite nations of Eastern

Europe, by contrast, the conquering Soviets urbanized and modernized society. Although Communism did create its own ruling class in those countries, it "was a lot less elitist than any previous kind of ruling system." At least, by relying on local elites, the Soviets with their "pragmatic character" managed to accommodate East European nationalism ("if not without difficulty") while also admittedly embarking on a policy of "conservative consolidation behind the Iron Curtain."

True, the whole edifice eventually collapsed. But that, in Mazower's ingenious explanation, is because Communism had achieved its original aims, having successfully offered "an example of how to tackle the economic difficulties of modern society." Instead of formulating newer and higher aims in tune with the changing times, Communist leaders made the mistake of resting on their laurels. Had the party modernized to deal with globalization, it would still be in power.

In short, although Mazower in general finds not much to boast about in 20th-century Europe, certain aspects of the story are brighter than others. Democracy, on paper the most hopeful system, fell victim everywhere to incompetent and corrupt leaders, and in the end, as a national project, came to nothing. As for Nazism, its fatal flaw was race theory. When it came to the re-making of society in a truly hopeful direction, only Communism could be said to pass muster.

WHAT IS one to say about all this? In the old days, apologists for Communism used to set the terms of argument to suit themselves, ignoring or distorting whatever did not fit their purpose. Mazower is much more sophisticated, but essentially no different. There is, for instance, no effort made in *Dark Continent* to assess the character of Lenin or Stalin—or, for that matter, of Hitler. Goebbels and Himmler are dealt with in a few scattered references,

POLICY *Review*

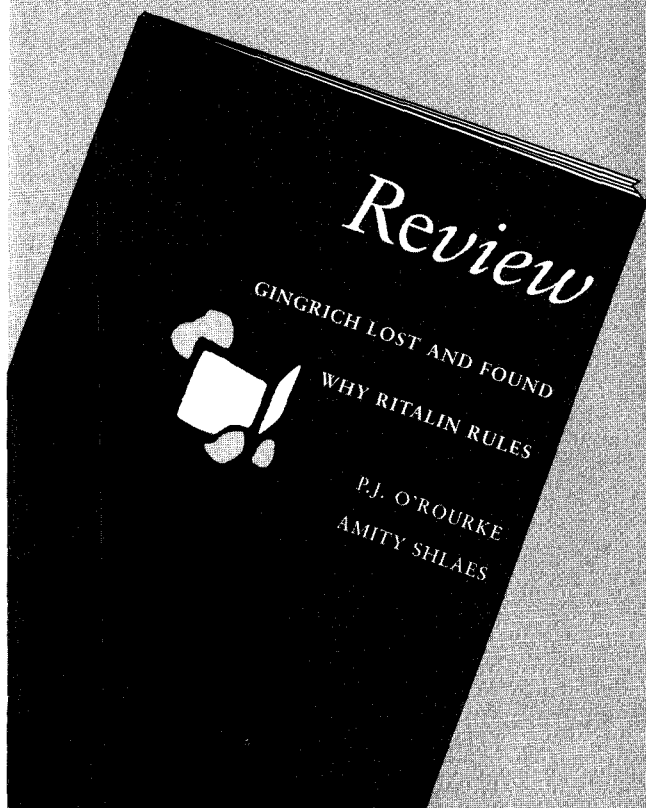
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Beria merits a single parenthesis, Trotsky is omitted altogether. There is no account of the Moscow show trials or of terror as an instrument of Soviet policy. Although Soviet (and Nazi) mass murder is of course acknowledged, not a single witness or survivor has been allowed a voice. Nor is there any mention of the fact that not a single one of those responsible for the Gulag has been brought to trial.

The list of selective omissions only grows. No acknowledgement that the Ukrainian famine of the 1930's, in which *millions* perished, was deliberately induced. No mention of the Muslim Basmachis and others in different Soviet republics who fought to the death for their independence, and lost. No mention, in Mazower's narrative of the post-war years, of the transformation of Nazi camps in Eastern Europe into Soviet camps, or of the massive Soviet recruitment of Nazi policemen and officials. No mention of the cal-

culated destruction of free Poland during and after the war. No mention of Jan Masaryk, thrown out of the window in Prague for dissenting from the Soviet takeover of his country. Nothing about Masaryk's colleague Eduard Benes, or about Alexander Dubcek, who in 1968 tried once again to free Czechoslovakia from the yoke of Moscow. Nothing about the Brezhnev doctrine, or about the Helsinki accords; no mention of a single Soviet dissident, not even Solzhenitsyn. No proper assessment of Gorbachev or of the choices he made; no analysis of Russian or other nationalisms; no mention of Yeltsin. Above all, no acknowledgment of the millions who took to the streets only ten short years ago in horror and refutation of Communism in theory and practice and in celebration of its collapse.

In a downbeat and perfunctory epilogue, Mazower invites Europeans to come to terms with the latest governing idea to come alive in

their continent: the European Union. Nominally democratic, this new creation lacks supporting democratic institutions or practices. The countries subscribing to it, distinct in language, religion, law, and historical experience, have little to guide them in their adventure into the unknown except the previous collective experiments with which, in this century, the continent has been hounded near to death. A mishmash of brightly repainted borrowings from Hitler's New Order and Communism is now projecting old disorders into the future—and this, in the absence of proper Communism, is what the Europeans are to make do with.

Or so Mazower leaves it. Sooner or later, surely, the will and character and free choices of many millions of very diverse individuals will weigh more heavily in history's balance than this ugly and inhuman scenario based on a wildly distorted reading of the past.



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